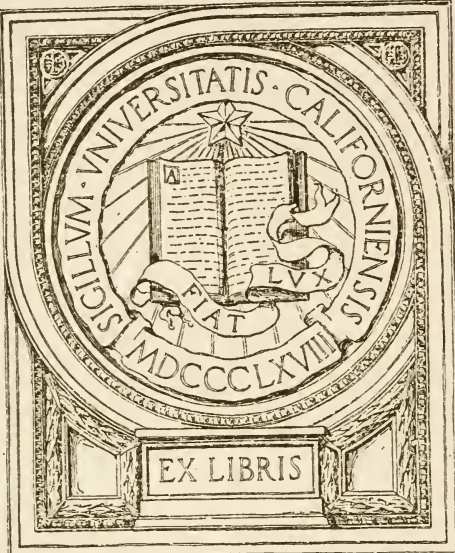


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RANKELL'S REMAINS

AN AMERICAN NOVEL

BY

BARRETT WENDELL

AUTHOR OF "THE DUCHESS EMILIA"

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1896

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RANKELL'S REMAINS.



INTRODUCTION.

IT is now some time since I told a little company, gathered after dinner, a fragmentary story that had come to my knowledge. Some of them paid little attention, thinking it, I suppose, dull and broken. But some listened from beginning to end, and told me when all was over, and we were parting for the night, that I should do well to write it down.

I have tried to. The task has not been easy ; yet the harder it has been, the better it has seemed worth the doing. In the life about us there are meanings that men who dabble in books are apt never to see, while those who see them have no time in the midst of business

to write them down or even to express them in their own thoughts. And this story, fragmentary as my knowledge of it is, has, at least for me, a meaning that I can ill put in words, but that helps me to feel, what of all things I hold a man should teach himself to feel, that this modern world of ours, even in our own America which the fastidious are prone to sneer at, is as true a passage in the great book of human life as was the Greece of Homer, or the Palestine of the Hebrews, or the Italy of Dante, or the England of Shakspeare. The same sun lights our lives ; the same shadows darken them ; the same humanity lives and throbs and rejoices and suffers about us, and leaves us in new forms the same lessons of wisdom and of folly.

Yet after all, as I have said, my story is only a few fragments, ill fitted together, and telling little more of the man with whom it chiefly deals than those broken bits of frieze that the archæologists uncovered at Assos tell of the great temple of which they formed a part. And what task was before me has often been

a puzzle. Was it to make a restoration, complete in itself but bearing in every line the stamp of me, the restorer? or was it not rather to place side by side what fragments I had, and let whoever chose think for themselves what the fragments mean? After more than one year of thought, the latter way has seemed the better.

So this is what I shall tell to such as care to read what I write. There lived among us, in times that we can still remember, one Rankell, a man whose name at least was known to everybody, and is not yet quite forgotten. He lived, and worked, and sinned, and died. His life altered the lives of others that it touched, — now for the better, now for the worse. And he left behind him sundry things that have perished, and others that survive.

Now, it happened that at three several times I came to know something of the work that, meaning or unmeaning, he was doing in the world; and to me that work seemed all evil. But now that he is dead and the years begin

to pass, even though as yet they be not very many, I grow to think of these matters differently, and to see that when we are no longer left to tell of what harm he worked about us, the traces of him on the earth will bear a different aspect from the aspect he bore. But all this I see only dimly, and can express best, I think, by telling it just as it has come to me.

In this book, then, I shall tell first how Rankell looked, and what was the common story of his daily life; for nowadays the dead ride fast, and it may well be that what a few years ago was common talk is already out of sight and out of mind. Next, in the order in which I knew them, I shall tell the three passages of his life that I came to know; and except that all three concern him they have nothing in common. Then I shall tell how he died, and what he left behind, and finally what is become of it.

I.

RANKELL.

I.

PRECISELY at half-past eight o'clock in the morning, if you happened to be walking down town, you might have seen emerge from a brown-stone house neither more nor less over-ornamented than its neighbors, a brisk little gentleman in a decent black suit. Of a fine day he would turn his face resolutely to the business part of the city, and tramp along block after block at such a rate that you would have found it hard to overtake him. But you might have kept near enough to observe that his beaver hat was old and very carefully brushed, that his clothes were a trifle threadbare but scrupulously neat, and that he wore well-blacked top-boots and carried a black cane with a plain gold head, — rather as a badge of respectability than because he needed aid in walking. If you happened to meet him, you

might have noticed that his low-cut waistcoat revealed an old-fashioned plaited shirt fastened with plain pearl buttons, that his black cravat was rather negligently tied about a high collar, and that this collar was surmounted by a colorless little face, surrounded with thin yellow hair and a bristling yellow chin-beard. And as you came near enough to see that this queer countenance was habitually wrinkled with a fixed smile that made the light-blue eyes look very cunning, and displayed a full set of teeth of much the same color as the hair, you might well have wondered — if indeed the inconspicuous little man excited your curiosity — whether he was forty years old or seventy.

If the day were cloudy, you might have seen the same man armed with a large cambric umbrella instead of the gold-headed cane; and at such a time, when he stepped out of doors he would look curiously at the heavens, and sometimes stand for a moment in colloquy with himself. Then, if an omnibus came lumbering along, he would often hail it, and clamber in

to be borne off through the mud toward his destination. The first I ever saw of him, I remember, was in an omnibus one drizzling winter morning. What makes me remember him is that in paying his fare he accidentally dropped a small coin into the straw at his feet, and passed a good five minutes in hunting for it, to the manifest discomfort of his neighbors. The act excited my sympathy, particularly as some in the omnibus were disposed to smile. To me the sight of an elderly man treasuring his pennies was by no means ludicrous; so I offered to help in his search.

“Thank you, sir,” he said, rather sharply, “I can find it myself;” and sure enough, in time he found it. Then, having pocketed it, he rested his thin yellow hands on the handle of his umbrella, and looking about with his by no means contagious smile, nodded to one or two solid-looking citizens in the omnibus, wishing them good-morning.

“Bad weather, sir,” said one of them.

“Yes, ’t is,” he answered, with no change of expression. “Any news?”

“Don’t hear of any,” said his friend ; whereat the little gentleman nodded briskly, and stared at the opposite window lost in thought.

If you had watched this personage closely, you would have discovered that at precisely nine o’clock, rain or shine, he reached and entered Rankell’s ; and anybody in that part of the town could have told you that he was Rankell himself. Rankell’s was known throughout the country as the place where you could buy, at the lowest price, the best quality of everything, from kitchen furniture to French lace and English harnesses. How any business had ever attained such size and complexity, or having attained it was ever carried on, puzzled people far and wide. But the fact remained, and is notable, among other things, for having stirred to the utterance of parable a very solvent banker who amuses himself with farming somewhere in Connecticut.

“Well, sir,” said this banker, when I once

expressed wonder at the growth of Rankell's, "do you know how I set to work to grow a prize squash? I get the vine well planted, and put in a lot of manure, and then when the blossoms come I make my man cut off all but one. When that one grows, sir, it's a whacker. I've taken prizes at the county show any time these fifteen years, let alone honorable mention."

This was uttered at a political dinner, and so exhausted the creative powers of the banker, that for the rest of the evening he did little but listen to the speeches as he contemplatively chewed the end of his cigar.

Once inside his store, Rankell might have been seen to thread his way through the maze of counters with the skill of one who knows every inch of his ground. And though business was hardly begun at nine in the morning, every man, woman, and child in the establishment was sure to be in the proper place; and there was no whispering or loitering as the sharp-eyed proprietor made his way to an inner counting-room. Here was a single desk, and

a pivot chair, and a ticker. And here, report said, Rankell would sit down at once and set to work.

Just how Rankell worked nobody knew, — except that he worked alone. Of course, certain superficial facts were patent. He always found a pile of letters waiting for him, and always opened them himself; as fast as he read one he would make a note on it in pencil and fling it down. And he could take in at a glance letters that anybody else would have puzzled over for an hour; no eccentricity of handwriting or rhetoric offered any obstacle to his intelligence. When his letters were read he would strike a little bell summoning his confidential clerk, Mr. Lottimer, of whom I shall have something to say by and by. He was called a confidential clerk, because he was allowed to enter Mr. Rankell's office when anybody wished to communicate with Mr. Rankell; but so far as confidences went, he knew, I take it, as little of Rankell as anybody else. Rankell told him what to do: Lottimer never asked

or expressed an opinion; and what opinions Rankell had he always kept to himself.

Mr. Lottimer's first summons of a morning was to receive a number of letters, to be answered by the clerks. His second was usually to receive other letters which Rankell had thought proper to write for himself, and which were to be copied in a private book. Then, when Rankell had despatched his correspondence, the brisk little man would be seen, when by any chance his door was ajar, busy with newspapers, with his ticker, or with some of the documents that always littered his desk. Every now and then he would summon Mr. Lottimer for a few words of direction; and in these directions lay the mystery of his method, — for no one of them often appeared to have anything to do with the last, yet somehow at the end of the year all fitted together.

You have been at an industrial exhibition, I dare say, where a machine was busily making some complicated product of modern ingenuity, — a pair of corsets, or a silk book-

mark illuminated with allegorical devices and a portrait of Garfield or the Lord's Prayer; you have seen the warp rise up and down with irregular regularity, like waves in a pool where a stone has been thrown; you have seen various shuttles fly back and forth as wildly as dragon-flies; and by and by there has issued from the machine a finished article, pronounced beautiful by the manufacturer and the crowd. You have seen the thing made; but how it has been made you have no idea, because you have not understood the machine. Rankell was once likened to a machine of this kind; his function being to weave a fortune,—or, if you prefer, to hammer out dollars. He was in perfect working order; and the mystery about him was simply that nobody understood his mechanism.

This simile always seemed to me good. Like a machine, Rankell had no friends, though everybody knew him by name; like a machine, he never consulted anybody; like a machine, he never went out of his way; and like a ma-

chine, he played the devil with whatever was in it.

Another fact that helped remove him from ordinary humanity was that nobody rightly knew where he came from. People vaguely believed that he had been raised somewhere in the country, and began life as a pedler. At all events, there had once been a time when there was no Rankell's. Then a small shop had appeared with his name over the door; and year by year the shop had grown. The origin of the germ, however, was as mysterious as if the great store had been Asiatic cholera. All that people definitely knew of Rankell was that when he first appeared in his small shop he was already a colorless little man, with faded yellow hair and beard, and decent black clothes. The only change ever noted in him was that when he moved into the great building that made his name national he first allowed himself the luxury of a gold-headed cane. He never went into society of any kind, and he never married.

II.

So much the whole world knew of Rankell,—and more too ; for, like most things in Christian lands, he had one aspect for six days of the week and another for the seventh.

He went to church a long way from home. And as he always walked, and always made it a point to be in his pew before service began, he had to start betimes ; so when he stepped out of doors the avenue he lived on would be almost empty. The omnibuses were laid up for the day ; a few carriages might be waiting at doors for people still at breakfast ; an occasional baker or milkman might dash about with irreverent clatter,—that would be all. The flagged sidewalks would be almost as bare as the pavements ; so for a good while there would be few to observe the change that was come over Rankell.

For of a Sunday he looked old. He walked slowly, pausing at street-crossings, as if the

gutter were an obstacle not lightly to be passed over. His clothes, soberly decent as ever, looked very new ; his face lost the cunning lines that marked it of a week-day ; the wrinkles about his small eyes and his thin lips assumed a benevolent air. So with slightly trembling step he would walk down block after block of flagged sidewalks from the new brown-stone region, where he lived alone, to older streets, where square brick houses with breathing spaces about them remain to show what the town was like before Rankell or Rankell's were thought of. Now and then elderly folks in Sunday clothes would emerge from one of these houses ; and sometimes the men would bow to him, and he in return would take off his unfashionable Sunday hat, putting his cane under his left arm the while.

Walking at his slow pace, it took him an hour to reach the church where he had been a regular attendant for years ; so by the time he turned into the iron gate of the churchyard, open that one day of the week, there were plenty

of people of the better sort and not a few of the poor to keep him company at worship.

It was a queer church for Rankell to go to. Most men of his kind, notable for success in what everybody is trying to do, serve God in churches as new and rich as themselves. Ill-natured people, indeed, say that the only reason they go to church at all is that in conservative minds not to go would still affect their credit; so they naturally prefer conspicuous places of worship, where the reporter who comes to take the sermon may occasionally note their presence. But old St. Peter's, where Rankell went, was not a place to attract reporters.

Away back in colonial times the church had been built in the midst of fields, where of a Sunday the churchmen could look across rolling country to the rivers that still flowed between green banks. So they looked, Sunday after Sunday, all through the eighteenth century; and many of them were safe in the churchyard before the Revolution came to drive most of the rest away, and to leave what few remained

perplexed as they listened to a service with the king's name stricken out. In the prayer-book of St. Peter's the parson will still show you a yellow piece of parchment pasted over the prayer for God's servant George,—the second of the name,—King of Great Britain, Ireland, and France. After the Revolution the country grew richer, and the trees in St. Peter's churchyard tall and full, and the gravestones plentiful; and marble memorials of the great folk began to cover the walls under the galleries. Then the city, which used to be far away over a country road, crept nearer; and the river-banks began to be covered with wharves, and great ships came sailing by, instead of the smaller craft that used to dot the waters. By and by, you could hardly say when, the city was upon the green churchyard, eddying about it as the tide eddies about a little island; and before Rankell's time the tide of the city had surged past St. Peter's, leaving the churchyard, with its century-old trees, surrounded by shops and stores and apartment houses less expensive than

those in fashionable neighborhoods. Now the place was half forgotten, except by the descendants of the families whose monuments were on the walls or in the churchyard, and by such astute poor people as understood the advantages of frequenting a place of worship where the solid part of the congregation inherit traditions of benevolence along with fortunes two or three generations old.

Rankell had gone to St. Peter's for years, and for twenty or thirty had been on the vestry, which boasted some of the oldest names in town. Every Sunday, just before service began, he would come gravely down the aisle, his hat upside down in his right hand, his stick dragging in his left. He would slowly turn the wooden button that fastened the white-panelled door of his pew, and resting his hand on the polished mahogany rail would open the door and pass in. Then, after laying his hat and his stick on the red cushion, he would reach over and fumblingly turn the button again, to lock himself in. The sexton had in-

structions that no stranger was under any circumstances to be allowed in the pew. Then Rankell would bow his head in preliminary prayer, and lifting it before long, would sit until the service began, with features composed to an expression of benignity.

When the parson began to inform his dearly beloved brethren to what ends the Scripture moveth them in sundry places, Rankell would open a large-printed prayer-book ; and holding the volume in his wrinkled hand he would read the responses with a loud voice, rising to his feet and bending his head in prayer among the first. And when the sermon came, whatever it was about, Rankell would listen with scrupulous attention.

When the sermon was over, and the time for contribution arrived, he would emerge from his pew, and walking deliberately to the chancel-rail would receive at the hands of the officiating divine a large silver plate. This he would gravely pass from pew to pew in one aisle, while other vestrymen did likewise in others.

When this task was done, he would come slowly down the broad aisle, holding the plate in his left hand, his right fumbling in his waistcoat pocket for his own share of the contribution. This never appeared until, last of all the vestrymen, he was mounting the altar steps. Then, having deposited his plate and his offering on the top of the pile the waiting parson held, he would turn about, and with calmly serene countenance go back to his pew ; there he would bow his head to receive the benediction. Then, with his fellow-worshippers, he would rise to organ music, and gravely passing down the aisle would make his way out of church and so home to dinner.

III.

AND this, I think, is all that common report said of Rankell. At all events, I knew nothing more of him for a long time. What else I shall tell here came to me later.

Among the old parishioners of St. Peter's was

a family called Wyborne, of whom by and by I shall have a good deal to say. They had held their pew in the broad aisle, I believe, ever since the church was built, and still came there during the season when they were in town, chiefly, I take it, because their grandfathers had come before them. It is certainly agreeable, when the sermon is dull, to look at a series of stately, if ugly, marble tablets, on which are carved, along with your family arms, many flattering things about several generations of your ancestors ; and this is particularly agreeable when the flattering things are all couched in a sonorously barbarous Latin that affords healthy exercise to the half-forgotten scholarship which at length enables you to understand it.

At the time when I knew the Wybornes the head of the family was an elderly gentleman, the fourth or fifth who in the direct line had borne the name of Lawrence. He was a big, good-natured man, with sleek gray hair parted in the middle and brushed forward above his ears ; and he wore a patriarchal beard, and

a moustache that quite covered the lips from which issued a voice mellowed by generations of good dinners, good wine, and good company. Those who knew him best were accustomed to say few respectful things about his brains ; but I never heard anybody question the simplicity of his heart or the excellence of his manners.

One Sunday morning I took it into my head to go to St. Peter's ; and meeting at the door Mr. Wyborne, who offered me a place in his pew, I sat with him through the service. When we came out of church together, we stood for a moment in the portico buttoning our coats, as the sunshine came streaming between the round columns with Corinthian capitals. It was early spring ; crocuses were sprouting in the churchyard, and I said something about the quiet charm of the place.

"I've always been fond of it," said Mr. Wyborne. "It's one of the few left where you can be sure to find nobody who does n't belong there. But, do you know, we shan't be able to say that much longer. That spruced-up tomb

is n't a new one, but it is the next worst thing. A few years ago it was in bad condition, and John Van Brugh, the man it belonged to, put the whole family in pine boxes and carted them over to Lawnwood. Then he got leave from the Aldermen to sell the old tomb to Rankell the shopkeeper ; and Rankell put it in order to be buried in. Rankell's not a bad kind of person, to be sure ; I've known him for years, and in a business way he has done me some friendly turns ; but you can't help feeling that among the old people here a man like Rankell will be horribly out of place."

Here Mr. Wyborne suddenly stopped talking ; for just as he was expressing his opinion of Rankell with the freedom he permitted himself in all expression of what opinions he had, the little man appeared at his elbow ; and as Rankell stiffly acknowledged Mr. Wyborne's greeting, his face had more of the grinning impenetrability that marked it on week-days than was commonly to be seen in it of a Sunday.

For of a Sunday, as I have said, Rankell

looked venerable as he sat alone in his pew, with his eye-glasses at such an angle on his nose that he could look through them at his prayer-book and over them at more distant objects. And as I had watched him listening to the sermon with an elderly, benevolent air, his faded yellow hair and beard had reminded me of a shopworn halo. He would make an admirable type, I thought, of the patron saint of American shopkeepers. I said so now to Mr. Wyborne, suggesting that we might invent a legend for him.

“Bless me!” exclaimed Mr. Wyborne, “I never invented anything in my life. But you know Rankell has a kind of story. I’ll tell it you some day when we have time.”

IV.

THE time came one afternoon not long afterwards, when I met Mr. Wyborne at the Club and reminded him of his promise.

“Oh, yes,” he said, as we lighted cigars. “The

story is about the way Rankell took to coming to St. Peter's. You would n't think it, to look at him ; but, 'gad, sir, if the story means what I think it does, it's as pretty a piece of sentiment as you 'd wish to hear.

“ You know the pew he sits in, opposite mine. It used to be the Lees' ; they were cousins of mine on my mother's side. They 're all dead now ; Rankell bought the pew when old Philip Lee died, fifteen or twenty years ago. Of course you can't remember Mary Lee ; but in her day she was the prettiest girl in town. She had more offers than any three others, and why the deuce she always said 'no,' she could n't have told you herself. Well, like other girls — my daughter among the number — she liked to spend money ; and as she had plenty to spend, you could generally find her of a morning running about among the shops. So when Rankell's shop got to be known a little, I suppose she went there. Anyhow, he saw her somewhere. Of course he didn't know her ; he never did. But one Sunday he turned up at

St. Peter's in a gallery seat where he could look down at the Lees ; and from that time, sir, he never missed a Sunday, and was always in his place before anybody else. I used to watch him sometimes when the sermon was heavy, — it was apt to be heavier in those days than it is now. As a rule he wasn't paying much attention ; he was generally looking down, with just such a queer smile as he has now, at Mary Lee's bonnet. She used to wear a big bonnet lined with blue. They would call it frightfully ugly nowadays ; but it showed off a pretty face uncommonly well.

“I used to laugh with Mary about her conquest, and she didn't like it much. He was a horrid little vulgar tradesman, she used to say ; and so he was, even if he couldn't help it. Well, to make a long story short, she took a fever when she wasn't much over twenty, and it carried her off. She was ill two or three weeks, and while she was ill, her father told me, a curious thing happened. Every single night a man the servants didn't know would call to ask

how she was. They got to wondering who it could be; he never left his name. She died, I said, did n't I? They buried her from old St. Peter's. Everybody came, and the body of the church was full. About the middle of the service I happened to look up, and there was Rankell all alone in the gallery, looking just as he looked of a Sunday, only that the grin was gone. His face, sir, was a study. When a man that looks mean feels a thing he shows it in a way that's awful. I felt horribly about Mary, you know; but when I caught my first glimpse of that queer little man looking queerer than ever I could n't help smiling. But, I tell you, when he looked down and caught my eye I didn't smile any more. And I didn't smile afterwards, when they had taken her out into the churchyard, and I saw Rankell standing back all alone, where the family would not be apt to see him, without a sign of a grin on his mean little face.

“When the funeral was over he did n't move for a minute, so I went up and held out my

hand. I knew him a little ; I'd bought gloves and things at his shop. Well, he took my hand and squeezed it hard, and shook it. Then he said it was a fine day, though it was really a nasty raw one ; and then he blew his nose with a big red handkerchief, and walked off without another word.

“Of course the servants were there ; and when Rankell was well out of the way, one of the men came up to me and asked if I would tell him who had been talking to me. I thought he was abominably rude ; but before I had time to say so, he begged my pardon. He asked, it seems, because he felt sure it was the stranger that had kept coming to inquire for Miss Mary. I happened to go by Rankell's shop later, and, do you know, the fellow had closed it for the day.

“It was n't long before he moved down into the side-aisle, in a pew next the Lees'. And when old Philip Lee, Mary's father, died, Rankell bought theirs. It must be forty years since Mary died ; I could n't have been much above

twenty at the time ; but only last week, as I came out of church, I noticed Rankell, just in front of me, looking over his shoulder at the place where she was buried. I looked too. There were fresh flowers on her grave. It was just about this time of year she died."

V.

AND this, I think, is all I know of Rankell's life, beyond the three stories I am going to tell. It is little enough ; and so much of it is only hearsay, that I find myself wondering now whether perhaps I might not have done better by trying to fill the outline. But, after all, this outline, slight though it be, is what has made Rankell seem to me what he seems to-day. So I think that by leaving it here in all its imperfection I shall do my work most truly.



II.

THE WYBORNES.

I.

THE first of my three stories has to do with Mr. Wyborne, of whom I have already told something. His family was popularly supposed to have been in easy circumstances since the beginning of time, or at all events since the settlement of the country. But in point of fact, I believe, the Wyborne fortune began with the successful trading of a person of obscure origin, who flourished a generation or two before the Revolution and was permitted by the lax custom of the time to engrave on his plate the arms of an English family whose name resembled his own. His descendants carefully preserved the fortune, made the arms a prime article of faith, and bequeathed to the Lawrence Wyborne of whom I write, a considerable landed estate not far from town, an income — from rent and other sources — suffi-

cient to preclude the necessity of doing anything, and all the instincts of a gentleman.

He married for love, but had the good sense to fall in love with a lady by no means penniless; and for many years he lived an uneventful, inoffensive life. In a private way he became pretty well known. For both he and his wife were fond of company; and having a fine house in the country and another in town, and being accustomed to the use of what they had, however fine, they kept up, year in, year out, a round of entertainments that ultimately made them as famous in society as anybody can be in America.

Mrs. Wyborne, however, was old-fashioned enough to be mindful of her matronly duties. At intervals her social career was interrupted by the birth of a child. I forget how many were born; three survived,—two sons, and a daughter, a good deal younger than her brothers. The birth of this daughter marked the turning-point in the family history. Mrs. Wyborne never recovered from the effects of her con-

finement; and in the course of a year or so she died, leaving her husband for the first time face to face with the serious facts of life.

These he faced with the courage of a gentleman. He sent his boys to a boarding-school and subsequently to college, where they learned as little and enjoyed as much as most youths in easy circumstances. He engaged for his daughter a governess of unimpeachable character, who was neither pretty nor clever, and so managed for years to keep her in the house without being accused of intending to marry her. And feeling, no doubt, lonely, and being perforce prevented from living the active social life that had absorbed his energies in his wife's time, he turned his attention to the management of his property. This he proceeded, as the phrase goes, to improve. He greatly beautified his country-place; he set out trees, cultivated flowers, and with the help of professional advice achieved some triumphs of landscape gardening. He started model farms, too; and in general attempted to better the condi-

tion of his tenants, by way incidentally of making the portions of his estate which brought him an income do a little more towards meeting his increasing expenses. And finding after a while that model farms did not produce model farmers anxious to pay more than their neighbors for the use of land, he began, with varying fortune, to dabble in outside affairs, — purely, he was careful to state, with a view to judicious and profitable investment.

II.

MY knowledge of him began at this time. Hospitable temper and habit were still strong within him. So when his boys came home for a vacation they were free to bring with them what friends they pleased, sure of a royal welcome. As I went to school with the Wyborne boys, in the classes with Howard, the younger, I was often bidden to these vacation festivals, which we were accustomed to think the perfection of earthly bliss. No one, I suspect,

really cared much for Howard Wyborne, — a commonplace youth of uncertain temper and a tendency to unwinsome weakness of character ; yet, thanks to his father's hospitality, which I honestly believe the simple-minded gentleman dispensed without a thought beyond the pleasure of his guests, Howard was what is called popular. Without analyzing our motives, we bore with his oddities and treated him as if he were the best fellow imaginable. In return came the regular invitations to the Wybornes', for which we eagerly curtailed the time allotted for displaying to our affectionate, uninteresting families the growing results of the educational processes to which we were subjected.

As I write, there come back memories of many visits to the old colonial place, with its terraces, and its lawns sloping down to the river where we could swim and row at will, and its gardens always full of bright flowers, and its tall elms rustling in the summer breeze ; of winter visits too, with coasting, and skating,

and dances, and ghost-stories before wood-fires blazing on tall brass andirons, and sundry warm drinks provocative of delicious dizziness. But one visit, I think, fairly typical of the rest, is alone worth dwelling on; and that because some trifling things that happened then have a little bearing on the story I mean to tell.

III.

IT was just before I went to college. Lawrence Wyborne, the older son, was already there; and Anna, his sister, was just emerging from the condition of a little girl. It was then, I remember, that I first found her something more than a tiresome fact. The visit was in winter; and the day after we arrived Miss Anna declared an intention of joining us in skating. Lawrence, the most good-natured of boys, said it would be great fun; Howard grumbled some bad language which nothing but my manners prevented me from echoing. But when we got to the ice, and Lawrence had gallantly strapped

his sister's skates, and we were fairly skimming over the little pond, with dark evergreens all about and bright sunlight overhead, I began to change my mind; for the sparkle of little Anna's eyes, and the flush of her cheeks in the frosty air, and the dark hair waving under her little fur cap that had jauntily slipped to one side, made her very pleasant to look at. Naturally I asked her to skate with me; so hand in hand we went flying from one end of the pond to the other. She could skate, I found, as well as anybody. There was little chance for talk, though; all I remember is that as we ceased our strokes at the end of the pond, and went wheeling about in a great circle, she found breath enough to exclaim, "Isn't this fun?" and I to rejoin, "Isn't it?" These speeches, for the rest, exhaustively expressed my mental condition.

I had come from school with Howard to stay a week. We had had a short railway journey, enlivened by surreptitious cigarettes. And these had made me so unwell that they quite spoilt

the dinner which awaited us when, early in the evening, we were driven up to the rounded porch, whose wooden pillars with florid Corinthian capitals looked like marble in the moonlight. A number of young people, boys and girls, were already at the house, with Mrs. Henderson, Mr. Wyborne's cousin, to chaperon them. This Mrs. Henderson was a widow, with a comfortable fortune and no children. She liked society, and was good-natured enough now and then to like young people. And to this day I rarely think of Mr. Wyborne, as he used to sit at the head of his table beyond the silver candelabra with twisted branches, without calling up a companion picture of Mrs. Henderson beside a little table in the drawing-room, on which stood a *modérateur* lamp with a classical bronze base. Her silk skirts were arranged in folds that never moved in a whole evening. She wore fine laces about her throat and wrists; her dresses were usually so cut as to show that throat and wrists were still pretty; and as she sat disdaining the back of her chair, after the manner of the last

generation, her bright eyes with good-natured lines growing about them, and the almost girl-ish smile with which now and then she showed her firm white teeth, made her, in spite of gray barrel-curls surmounted by a lace cap with purple ribbons, an ideal presiding figure for the merry company about her.

What girls were in the party have nothing to do with this story, except that their pretty figures helped make up the picture I am trying to draw. But two or three of the boys in later days played some part in the events I am to tell. There was Tom Henderson, a nephew of our amiable patroness; he was a clumsy youth, with good clothes of which he took little care, and marked precocity in the society of stable-boys. There was young Dudley, whose family, Mr. Wyborne once said, was one of the oldest in America, and who nevertheless, perhaps because the family in question was no longer rich, would have been quite like anybody of humbler origin but for a knack of caricature that filled us with envy. I still have somewhere one of

his expressive if artistically imperfect sketches. It was executed by candlelight in Howard's room, while Howard and I, in our night-clothes, looked on with shivering admiration. It represents the presentation of Dick Hastings, recognizable by his heavy boots, to Mr. Wyborne and Mrs. Henderson, recognizable respectively by a beard vast enough to nest all Audubon's birds, and barrel curls that might have come straight from the cooper's.

This Dick Hastings, who had just appeared to us for the first time, was in Lawrence's class at college, and had been invited to occupy the second single bed in Lawrence's room, just as I had come to occupy that in Howard's. He arrived at about dusk, rather unexpectedly. Mrs. Henderson was dressing for dinner, and Mr. Wyborne, by some accident, not at hand; so Hastings was bundled up to Lawrence's room, to make himself fine for the evening. Before he and Lawrence appeared we were all gathered in the drawing-room, dressed in our best. Their approach was announced by a piercing creak of

shoe-leather; and as they entered they were in queer contrast. Lawrence, a handsome boy, could never help being neat; and beside his friend his attire seemed even more perfect than ever. For Dick Hastings, a pale youth with signs of a coming blond moustache and many freckles, looked by no means like the rest of the company. His coat, though it did not fit him, was tidy enough, and his linen immaculate; but his trousers, which bagged immensely at the knee, were evidently the same in which he had travelled, and his heavy top-boots, whence came the creak, were covered with the stains of mud. His hair, too, which was parted just above his left ear and well enough brushed in front, looked behind, where invisible from his dressing-glass, innocent even of a comb. And though Mr. Wyborne and Mrs. Henderson were too well bred to vary their welcome, we felt instinctively that this unkempt youth put their breeding to a test.

Hastings shook hands stiffly, said nothing whatever in answer to their pleasant speeches,

preserved throughout dinner impenetrable silence and an aspect of gloom, declined to join in after-dinner games, and finally announced — thus opening his lips for the first independent time — that he felt tired and guessed he would go to bed. So to bed he went, followed by Lawrence, whose hospitality would not suffer him to desert a guest.

Our boyish breeding was by no means equal to that of our elders. In Howard's room we talked Hastings over to our heart's content. Dudley, as I said, executed a drawing of his advent; Tom Henderson, having sententiously described him as a thundering scrub, sought the restless sleep of indigestion; and Howard surmised that we should not get much fun out of a fellow like that.

"Lawrence is a queer chap," he remarked later, when we were fairly tucked up in our respective beds.

"I like him anyway," said I, partly, I fear, from a sense of hospitable obligation.

"Oh, of course," said Howard, curtly; it

never entered a Wyborne's head that a Wyborne could command from outsiders anything but admiration. "Only, you see, he is always freezing to some confounded fool, like that countryman he has scared up now."

"Where did you say he came from?" I asked.

"Lord knows. Somewhere up in the country. His father is a doctor there, Lawrence says. Good-night." And in a minute more Master Howard was peacefully snoring.

Hastings's boots it was that gave rise to the two little incidents I am going to recall. The next day Tom Henderson came to us with a grin.

"I say, fellows," he began, "that chap Hastings has been and asked me where they keep the blacking, and I told him I'd send him some, and I've just been down to the village and bought half a dozen bottles. What do you suppose he'll say?"

What we supposed I do not remember; but the result of Henderson's pleasantry was an

unexpected visit from Lawrence, who came panting up to him a little later and called him aside. At first we could not hear what they said, but as the talk waxed warm their voices rose.

“I’ll do what I like,” exclaimed Henderson.

“If you do,” said Lawrence, “you’ll come here no more. And if it was n’t my own house I’d thrash you now.” Whereupon he turned away.

“Like to see you!” shouted Henderson after him, very red in the face. But from that time throughout the visit he behaved with circumspection.

From that time, too, Hastings’s boots were beautifully polished. He never changed them, though. Evidently they were his only pair.

A day or two later, as we were dressing, there came a tap at our door, and Anna’s voice was heard calling Howard.

“I want your old pumps,” she said, when he opened the door. Miss Anna, who was a bit spoilt, was accustomed to talk imperiously.

“What for?” asked Howard.

“I want them; that’s enough,” was her answer. And she got them.

Howard was ready for dinner before me. As he passed into the hall I heard Lawrence’s voice greet him, and they walked off together. A few minutes later, when I emerged from the room, I descried Miss Anna, pumps in hand, stealing on tiptoe toward Hastings’s door. There she tapped, and standing behind the doorpost held out the shoes. I saw the door open slightly. Then, as Hastings caught sight of the proffered gift, he dashed the door open, snatched the pumps, and flung them with all his strength after the scampering little figure that he did not stop to look at. Anna’s foot slipped, and she fell heavily against a chair. In a moment Hastings, half-dressed, was at her side, and I at his heels.

“My God!” he exclaimed, “I’ve killed her.”

Poor Anna’s forehead was bleeding from a rough gash, but she opened her eyes.

“Don’t tell anybody,” she said faintly. “You

did n't mean to. You did n't understand. I thought you would like them." And the little woman fainted.

Anna's command, possibly having the sanction that attaches itself to last words, no matter how unwittingly uttered, seemed to me sacred.

"Hide the shoes, you fool!" I said. "I'll go and call somebody."

With a dazed look he obeyed me, and nobody ever knew how poor Anna came to grief. The wound was not serious, to be sure, but the stitches left a scar. This, when she grew up, caused her to part her hair on one side, and draw it over her forehead,—a method of hair-dressing that gave rise among conventional people to a belief that she was rather fast.

Hastings went home next day, pretending that a letter called him. It was only after some hours, when a box of gaudy, inexpensive flowers arrived, with his compliments, for Anna, that anybody spoke of him.

"A very quiet young man," Mr. Wyborne called him.

“Not wholly at ease,” was Mrs. Henderson’s comment.

“He is awfully bright when you know him,” said Lawrence.

“I dare say,” said Mr. Wyborne. “He is respectably connected.” And the subject dropped.

IV.

I SHALL write no more of these matters, so trivial to those of whose own childhood they formed no part. I have told enough, I think, to show what the old life at the Wybornes’ was like; and that is all I wished to do here. For a good many years had passed, and with them the Civil War, before the matters fell out that have made me put the story of the Wybornes in this book concerning Rankell.

Lawrence Wyborne fell at Gettysburg. His body was never found. All that we knew of his end came from Dick Hastings, who was in the same regiment and brought home his effects.

Howard, who like his brother had gone

straight from college to the army, was wounded more than once, but came home at last unmaimed. He was greatly changed, however, from the commonplace, unamiable gentleman of means that he would have grown to be in times of peace. Quiet life he found unbearable. After some doubt as to how he should direct his energy, he violated all family tradition, and, I suspect, gravely disturbed his father, by taking, like most of his fellows, to a down-town life. A few years after the war he was a bustling member of the Stock Exchange, ready among the first to smash such hats as unwritten law forbade good brokers to wear.

The strain of these years had told on Mr. Wyborne. He was grayer than he used to be; he had lost one or two teeth, and spoke with a slight lisp. When the boys went to the war he stopped entertaining, and he never left off the mourning he wore for Lawrence. His manner, to be sure, kept the old courteous charm; but as time went on he grew grave and silent, often looking worried, and seeming absent-minded

when you spoke to him. If it had not been for Anna, I believe he would never have opened his house again. But of course it was necessary to bring her out; so one year a new round of festivities began at the old Wyborne place.

To some of these I went. Young girls thought them as perfect as I used to think the Wybornes' parties in the old days; but to me these new gayeties seemed forced. Mr. Wyborne was more formal than he used to be; his hospitality was becoming a matter rather of manners than of heart. And as for Howard, he voted the whole thing a bore until the dining-room opened; then he found consolation which usually absorbed him.

The first of these parties I distinctly remember. It was a garden-party, given one fine summer afternoon to introduce Anna; and as all the world came, you naturally saw a great many people you did not know. You saw others whom you knew only by sight; for Mr. Wyborne had always maintained that when you gave a general party, and had the room, it

was only kind to pass the compliment of an invitation to all the respectable people you knew.

“Half the time,” he would say, “they won’t come ; and if they do come, no harm is done. You forget it next day, and they always remember it.”

Thus it was that on this occasion society, for the first and last time, saw Rankell ; Mr. Wyborne, it appeared, had lately had a good deal to do with him in a business way. And apart from Anna, — who had grown so pretty that even without her vivacity she would have been a belle, — it is Rankell that I chiefly remember. Though I came early, he was there before me. Subsequently I learned that he had arrived exactly at the hour named in the invitation, to find nobody ready to receive him ; and as he wore a dress suit — apparently made for the occasion — Mrs. Henderson, when she at last appeared to receive the company, had the misfortune to mistake him for a waiter.

By thereafter devoting to the awkward little

man as much attention as she could spare, she tried to atone for this misadventure ; and Anna had smiles for him ; and Mr. Wyborne neglected other people in his efforts to put Rankell at ease. But for all that, nobody could quite forget that, though invited, he had not been expected ; and Rankell, as he stood unresponsively silent in his dress suit, looked aware of the fact. At last Mr. Wyborne took him away from the company for a walk about the grounds ; but even this excited from him no further expression than that he should think a place like this must require a great deal of money. And when finally, declining refreshment, he took his departure without a formal farewell, everybody was relieved.

“The truth is, my dear Lawrence,” was Mrs. Henderson’s comment on this incident, “that no man yet born ever understood how to make out a list of invitations. Positively you must leave all that to me.”

Mr. Wyborne was more than glad to do so. It was Mrs. Henderson, then, with unchanged

smile and curls, who acted as Anna's chaperon in society, where the young woman's toilets — always as brilliant as the extreme limits of taste permitted — were the despair of her contemporaries. This fact, together with the evident interest of Mrs. Henderson in her new duties, led people to whisper that the brisk old lady had views of her own about Anna.

For besides being pretty and amiable, the girl was commonly regarded as a good match; and young Tom Henderson, who had done good service in the war, was come back to figure as a leader of fashion, with habits quite as expensive as his income could stand. His aunt, it was thought then, had a natural anxiety to provide for him and for Anna at one stroke. The only serious obstacle in her way was that, very unfortunately, the young gentleman's catholicity of taste in matters feminine was a trifle more obvious than the customs of his time permitted.

V.

AT this period I began to see a good deal of Howard Wyborne. For, finding home life dull, he took to dining mostly at the Club, where I dined too. And though there was little sympathy between us, our old intimacy made us such good friends that we often talked with a freedom that could never have come had we met only in the later times.

One night when I happened to be dining with him, he asked me in the course of talk if I knew a man named Asa Cutting.

"Fat, elderly person?" I asked. "Gray chin-beard and big watch-chain?"

"Yes," said Howard. "He is a real-estate agent, or something of the kind."

"I know him by sight," I said. "I believe he looks after some of Rankell's business."

"Rankell!" exclaimed Howard. "By Jove! Do you suppose it was Rankell that sent him to the Governor? You ought to have seen them together."

“Who?”

“Why, Cutting and my father. It was as good as a play.” And Howard went on to tell the story.

Mr. Wyborne, it appeared to my surprise, had found himself in temporary want of money; so he had sent for this Cutting, with a view to placing a mortgage on one of the farms about the old country-house. The day before Howard told me the story, Cutting, who had taken the matter in charge, unexpectedly presented himself. He was a ponderous, awkward man, whose fat right hand occupied half its time in running pudgy fingers through his beard, and the rest in fumbling with the enormous watch-chain that decorated his protuberant person.

Mr. Wyborne began the conversation by asking if the business was arranged.

“No, sir,” said Cutting, awkwardly. “It can be done, though, if you choose to go on with it.”

“That question was decided,” said Mr. Wyborne, “when I placed the matter in your hands.”

“Of course, sir,” said Cutting. “Only another question has turned up.”

“Ha! Is anything wrong?”

“No, sir; quite the reverse. You see a gentleman has seen the property and likes the looks of it—” And here Cutting hesitated, growing red in the face.

“Well, sir,” said Mr. Wyborne, testily, “what of it? Does he want higher interest? I never borrow on other terms.”

“Exactly, sir. He knows that. You can easily get what you want, sir. Only this gentleman thinks so well of the property that he does n’t know but what he might like to buy.”

“I thought you understood,” said Mr. Wyborne, waxing warm, “that I have no intention of dividing the estate.”

“Exactly, sir. That is quite understood. This gentleman does n’t propose anything of the kind. The fact is, sir, my friend is prepared to make you a real handsome offer for the whole.”

At this Mr. Wyborne quite lost his temper. Cutting knew, he declared, what was wanted;

if he chose to execute a specific commission, he might do so; but nothing could make this proposal better than a gratuitous piece of impertinence.

Cutting muttered something, in a deprecatory tone, about a rare chance.

Mr. Wyborne cut him short. In future, he declared, he should place his business in the hands of men who had discretion enough to act as they were directed. And Cutting retired in discomfiture, leaving Mr. Wyborne to vent his wrath on Howard, who had been a silent spectator of the interview.

“The idea of asking the Governor to sell!” said Howard, as he finished the story. “You might as soon ask him to cut his whiskers. He has regular English ideas about that precious estate of ours. It costs him no end of money; but I believe he thinks the whole world would go to smash if he undertook to part with an acre. I’ve been wondering who was after it. Cutting, you say, does business for Rankell. I don’t believe it was Rankell, though. He

would have been apt to speak of the matter to me ; I know him pretty well. Besides, what the devil should he want of a place like ours ? It's only fit for a gentleman."

VI.

ABOUT this time it was apparent that something was going wrong with the Wybornes. Mr. Wyborne was becoming testy ; the uncertain temper shown in Howard's anecdote was evident even to casual acquaintances. And Howard himself grew taciturn, as might be expected when one of his disposition had something on his mind. Anna, however, was full of life and gayety. She went everywhere, and generally seemed uncommonly successful in the ordinary occupation of young women of her age and rank, — that is, in so filling her time with the pursuit of amusement that she had no leisure to reflect whether she was really amused or not.

Like other young women of her kind, too, she

was possessed not only of admirers in general, but of one or two in particular. Dissatisfaction with these, it was surmised, underlay the growing infirmity of the family temper. I was inclined to this view. Neither of the men whose names were oftenest coupled with hers was of the kind you would have chosen. One, as I have said, was Tom Henderson, about whose gallantries many stories were afloat. The other, whose qualities were very different, was Dick Hastings.

Hastings was grown to be a self-contained fellow, whom nobody liked. He had served in the army with some little distinction; and his intimacy with the Wybornes had lasted because he had been with Lawrence almost until he fell, and had brought home what last news of him had come. After the war he had disappeared for a while from general view; then he had turned up at the bar, with a promising practice. Irreproachable enough and to spare, professionally and in private life, and regarded as a man with a future, he managed to alienate whoever was disposed to be friendly. What a man who

had known him in the army said was commonly accepted as final. "I can't stand Hastings," exclaimed this usually genial personage. "He is too confoundedly on the make."

There was no real objection to Hastings, of course. Everybody respected his ability; he was aggressively blameless. But for all that, it was by no means pleasant to see the cold-blooded fellow, in search of money and position, deliberately using what advantages accident gave him to slip into the berth he wanted. He never went into society; I doubt whether he was asked anywhere. In public it was Tom Henderson who sent Anna flowers, and danced and drove and walked with her, after the manner of orthodox lovers. But now and then, particularly of a Sunday, you would find Dick Hastings at the Wybornes', *tête-à-tête* with the dashing young woman, who generally quieted down for his benefit. To be sure, Anna had tact enough to adapt herself to any company; but it certainly looked as if she fancied Hastings.

So people talked about the rivals, wondering

which it would be; and Mr. Wyborne could not help knowing this, and knowing too that neither of the men was of the kind to better a girl's condition in life. Both of them apparently wanted money and position. And Tom's relation to Mrs. Henderson made it impossible to break without a scandal; while Hastings, whose friendship with Lawrence Wyborne everybody knew, had thereby established a sacred right to visit the house when he pleased.

One night there was much talk at the Club about Tom Henderson. He had figured in a scrape with a pretty French governess whom somebody had brought home from Paris, and who had been hurriedly dismissed from service. Various versions of the story were circulating. Suddenly one of the narrators abruptly stopped, and began to chatter irrelevantly. Looking up, I saw that Howard Wyborne had joined the company. The impression was curiously disagreeable. Each of this group of men about town, chuckling over a loose story, had Anna Wyborne in mind.

It happened that Hastings was standing by, and as the group separated I caught his eye. My look must have expressed more than I meant it to, for he shrugged his shoulders with a disagreeably cynical smile.

“It is her own fault,” he said. “A woman in her position knows what she exposes herself to. She is food for philosophy, not for sympathy.”

And poor Miss Anna, people said, was bound to make her choice between these two aspirants. It was commonly thought, too,—and Hastings’s mood made it seem likely,—that she began to prefer the more agreeable if the more erratic Henderson. No wonder Mr. Wyborne and Howard were disturbed in mind.

It was not long, however, before we found out that there were other things to trouble them. The story of what these things were I shall tell, not just as it came to me, but briefly as in the end I learned it to be.

VII.

I HAVE said already that Mr. Wyborne, from the first, found the management of his property troublesome. As time went on it grew by no means less so ; but he rarely permitted himself to brood over the matter. If things go wrong, he used to say, you only make them worse by thinking of them ; and early in life he had mastered the fine art of dismissing from his mind what he could not comfortably keep there. By the time, then, that Howard abandoned family tradition to become a man of business, Mr. Wyborne was so used to lack of ready money that it rarely occurred to him to want any. Howard's business, however, occasionally required cash ; and Howard, accustomed as a matter of course to rely on his father for anything of that kind, made no scruple to ask for what he wanted.

For a long time Mr. Wyborne gave uncomplainingly ; and more than once, it is fair to

remember, Howard returned with profit what advances his father made. Oftener, however, some unexpected turn of events made his transactions result in loss. It was not surprising, then, that when at last Howard came with an unusually large demand, Mr. Wyborne hesitated.

In the secrecy of his library, where Howard, like the rest of the world, had supposed that his father did little but doze over newspapers and occasionally take down respectable books with a view to sustaining his favorite notion that he was a man of culture, Mr. Wyborne produced a startling array of business papers. These he carefully went over with his son. They showed how for years his affairs had ceased to prosper. What advances he had made to Howard had demanded fresh mortgages on the estate that was so precious to him in all but pocket; and now not an acre was free except the old house and the grounds about it. These he had religiously preserved.

“I hate to say no, Howard,” he told his son, “but can I honestly do more for you?”

There were tears in Howard's eyes when he found how matters stood. All his life, with the rudimentary ancestor-worship that survives in respectable families, he had thought of his father as one to whom you could turn with every-day troubles, secure in the belief that he knew no such trouble of his own. And here these folded papers, and these volumes of confused memoranda, and these books full of figures, showed how for years, under his quiet exterior, Mr. Wyborne had thought, and worried, and planned, and failed, without a word of complaint.

“Good Heavens, sir!” exclaimed Howard, “you have done enough and too much. You shall never sacrifice another cent for me.” And he held out both hands, fairly breaking down.

Mr. Wyborne took his hands, and for the moment, I believe, thought only of the comfort of being free at last to speak with his son of all that was on his mind. Now they should draw near together again, just as they had been near when Howard was a little boy. And then came

planning together as to how the trouble could best be cured. In the end the plan they chose was this.

The matter that Howard had in mind when he made this last appeal for help was different in kind from anything he had been concerned in before. Up to this time he had been acting for himself, or at least with no other judgment to help him than that of men little wiser than he. This new plan argued that he had acted better than any one supposed. With no imaginable reason beyond respect for his ability, a well-known financier had confidentially sent for him. Unfortunately he was not at liberty to say who the able financier was; for the sake of convenience he would call him Smith. Well, this Smith had set forth how a small syndicate—every one of them known for solid men—were about to undertake an operation that was sure in a few weeks to result in profit amounting to handsome fortunes for every one of the lot. Wanting a young man to help them in some details of the business, they had determined to propose

the plan to Howard. The chance was such as does not come twice in a lifetime. This Smith was perhaps the ablest financier in America. His partners were second only to him. This operation was just such as they were used to. And the whole responsibility of management rested with them; Howard's part was merely to do as they directed, and in the end to share profits that were as sure as any earthly thing could be.

Knowing now what a burden he had been, he declared that for himself he would have no part in the business. But this he would do: let him have what money could be raised, and he would use it, under Smith's direction, just as, if he had had any, he would have used his own. Then, when the profits came, they should go straight to his father and do what they could to repair the damage that had been done the family fortune.

Howard wished he were at liberty to tell such details of the plan as he knew; but these he was in honor bound to keep secret, along with the

names of Smith and his partners. More than once, however, he repeated that everybody knew these men to be among the ablest in America. So their confidence assured him that his career had been by no means as fruitless as it had sometimes seemed.

Seeing no other way, Mr. Wyborne bowed to fate, and at last reluctantly consented for a while to encumber this last part of his lands that he had hoped always to keep free.

VIII.

THIS he wished, if possible, to do secretly. He hated the idea of publicly recording, even for a few weeks, the fact that any one but a Wyborne had established a claim to property that he was accustomed to regard as a Wyborne's by the fundamental laws of nature. So he went to a man whose advice he often took in business matters, and whom he knew able to give, if he pleased, the help that Howard wanted. This was Rankell.

The prudent little man received Mr. Wyborne with much civility in the inner counting-room, where more than once they had sat together before. He listened attentively to all Mr. Wyborne had to say. Of course Mr. Wyborne was not at liberty to tell why he needed the loan he asked; and Rankell did not even inquire, but contented himself with pointing out, in much detail, the irregularity of an unrecorded mortgage. At first he would not think of granting such a request; at last, however, protesting that he would do so unusual a thing for nobody else on earth, he consented, with other lively professions of esteem, to make the loan. So, very quietly, the papers were drawn and locked up in Mr. Rankell's boxes, and Howard had the money. Whence it came he was not told, for Rankell had made absolute secrecy a condition of the loan. It was a friendly transaction, so remote from his common habits of business that even a whisper of it might cause him grave inconvenience.

For a while matters went well. Howard gave

good accounts of the progress of affairs, and at length grew jubilant over the prospect of restoring at a single stroke the failing fortunes of his family. I remember him well at this time, full of an excitement I failed to understand, laughing, bustling about, accosting us with a good-fellowship strange to his habits of life. I remember, too, how Mr. Wyborne was unlike himself in a very different way: how at the Club he often sat alone, in a brown-study, leaving unread in his lap papers that other men were waiting for. More than once, it afterwards appeared, Howard came for more money; it was only for a little while, — perhaps only for a few days, — and it was sure to be repaid a hundred-fold. He borrowed what he could from his friends, into the bargain. And some of us lent him quite as much as we could afford, out of remembrance, I fancy, of the pleasure his hospitality used to give us.

Then came a time when the papers were full of confused accounts of a great battle for wealth. There was a certain stock, of which the name is

neither here nor there, much in demand, and generally to be had if you chose to pay for it. Suddenly it grew scarce, and those who were bound to have it must pay what was asked. The price steadily rose, until it was doubled, trebled, quadrupled; the whole machinery of finance was disturbed; a well-known banker failed; ministers preached timely sermons about the sin of greed. And all the while Howard grew more jubilant; matters were going as he wished.

IX.

ONE night, after dinner, I was leaving the Club, when at the foot of the steps I heard some one call my name. Turning, I saw that it was Howard Wyborne, whose voice I had not recognized. As he came up to me and took my arm, I felt that his hand was trembling.

“I want you to go home with me,” he said hurriedly. “I can’t go alone. I’ve been waiting for somebody to come.”

At first I did not realize that anything serious had happened, nor yet when he suddenly turned about and passed into the Club, calling for brandy. Then, as he stood in a bright light, I could see that he looked strangely. His face was very pale; his moustache, which was generally fixed in a fierce military curl, was ragged; his dress was disarranged, his linen limp and soiled. As he poured out a glass of brandy, his hand trembled so that he spilt some on the table. Then he drank the liquor at one gulp, and taking my arm again, hurriedly bade me come with him.

Feeling the question ill-timed, I nevertheless permitted myself to ask what was the matter.

He laughed in a queer, nervous way.

“Never you mind,” he said; “it’s nothing — nothing. You’ll find out when we get home.”

So we hurried through the lamplit streets, jostled by the passing crowd, and listening to the jingling car-bells, and the snatches of talk of the passers-by, and the rumbling clatter of wheels on the stone pavements, and the piercing

shrieks of newsboys. At last we passed into the quieter street where the Wybornes lived, and so up the freestone steps of the square brick house that a generation ago had been among the finest in town.

Howard handed me a key. "Open the door," he said; "I can't."

I turned the latch, and we passed in. On one side of the hall was a square room, of which the dark polished door stood open. Over the marble chimney-piece hung a large picture, religiously believed to be by some old Italian master, and so black with age that, for all we could see, it might have been a Raphael. Behind a glass screen a coal-fire was crackling in the grate. Mr. Wyborne was slowly pacing the room, his hands behind his back; and on one side Anna sat at her piano, with Dick Hastings beside her. One of the candles that lighted her music had burned so low that the flame flickered in the draught that came from the opened street-door; the other light came from a long-necked modérateur lamp on a table beside the red plush

arm-chair where Mr. Wyborne had been sitting before he began his restless walk.

Howard clutched my arm with a grip that hurt me.

“Come in,” he whispered. “I can’t walk alone; I don’t know why.”

And so we entered, and all three of them looked at us in surprise. Mr. Wyborne started towards us; Anna uttered some exclamation at Howard’s strange appearance; Hastings stood up, looking extremely awkward.

As Mr. Wyborne came toward us, Howard dropped my arm and held out both his hands.

“Father,” he said, “it’s all over. We are ruined.” Then, with a kind of sob, he staggered, and would have fallen forward if Hastings and I had not caught him in our arms. We carried him to a sofa, where we laid him, with a fixed look on his pale face, quite insensible.

It was better thus, I believe, for they thought of him and not of themselves. Hastings vanished somehow, I know not whither; and I

hurried away for the nearest doctor, and waited to hear what news he brought. It was paralysis, he said. Poor Howard never walked again.

X.

THUS it happened that Hastings and I, who by mere chance were by when the trouble came, and so seemed nearer to Mr. Wyborne and Anna than others whom they knew as well, found our offers to help the poor gentleman in his confusion by no means unwelcome, and came to know what the trouble really was.

In brief it was this: Howard, seeing his speculation prosper in the hands of the eminent financier whom he had called Smith, had been seized with a wish to win more than his share of what profits came to the syndicate. In this wish it seemed as if he must have been encouraged by Smith himself. At all events, the man he described by that name appeared to have lent him no small part of what money

he used. But all this was confused and secret ; and as poor Howard's mind was never quite clear afterwards, we could learn little from him. This, however, was certain : as the price of the stock he was watching went slowly up, he began to buy privately, and ended by buying and agreeing to buy so much that at length he found himself at the end of his rope ; and just then, greatly to his dismay, the price began to fall. Then, on the day I have just written of, he had gone to Smith and peremptorily asked what this changed aspect of affairs meant. When was the syndicate's stock to be forced up to the highest price ? And then he had learned that it was not to be forced up at all. His sly friend, it appeared, had been buying so openly that all the world might know that he bought, trusting rightly that the unwary would follow his lead. Then quietly, through secret hands, he had sold more than he was buying, thus leading and beguiling all who followed him, and Howard most of all. And now these aspirants for wealth were left to do what

they might with the property and the contracts for which they had paid a dozen times their value.

Then when Howard learned what trick had been played him, he came home as I have told; and the man Smith who had led him into this trouble was no other than Rankell.

XI.

WHEN Hastings and I laid before Mr. Wyborne the papers that proved these facts, he would not believe what the writings told him.

“Rankell!” he exclaimed. “There’s some mistake. He’d play nobody such a trick. Why, I’ve known him for years. I’ve shaken hands with him too many times to believe it.”

So, as there was no other way to convince the honest gentleman, it was arranged that Mr. Wyborne and I should ascertain the true facts by calling on Rankell in person. To Rankell’s, then, we went, where we were kept waiting some little time. At last the door of his private

office opened to us. I had never seen the little den before. On two sides were white plastered walls; on the other two, white wooden frames filled with ground glass ran up to the ceiling twenty feet high. So great was the height, indeed, compared with the other dimensions, that the place looked like a whitened pit, with a grinning little pale-haired monster lurking at the bottom to work his pleasure on whoever happened to fall in.

Rankell bade us welcome over his shoulder. As we entered, he was scratching away at some letter. He did not even look up from his rolling-topped desk, covered with papers. Sit down, he said; he would be at liberty in a minute.

There was something in his dry manner that I found exquisitely irritating. This scampish little creature must know perfectly well that we came to confront him with a piece of rascality for which he deserved to have his neck wrung; yet here he coolly treated us like intruders. We were to wait his pleasure, it appeared. Be-

yond the ground-glass windows we could hear the bustle of the office, and farther off, of the great store. Nearer by, Rankell's scratching pen kept up a staccato duet with the clicking ticker that was vomiting paper tape into a tall basket at his side. I was tempted to bid him drop his work and listen. But, after all, the move ought to come from Mr. Wyborne, who sat silent. He was restless, though; he leaned forward in his chair, playing with his stick, whose ivory head was grown a little yellow with age. If the stick had been mine, I thought, I should have been tempted to let Rankell feel it. Possibly it was some such idea in Rankell's own mind that kept him so busy. This important letter of his was probably a subterfuge by means of which he was collecting self-possession for the exposure that was at hand.

I rather expected that when the prolonged minute he kept us waiting came to an end he would still be in confusion. But closely as I watched him I could see no outward signs of it. He scribbled away as unconcerned as if he

had been alone. Finally with a vicious scratch of the pen he signed his name; then he reached out his hand and touched a bell. In came a clerk to receive a handful of papers and sundry words of direction. And then Mr. Rankell was ready to deal with us.

I watched him with curiosity. I almost pitied him, thus forcibly brought face to face with his knavery. But as Rankell wheeled about in his pivot chair he looked by no means abject. He rocked his chair back on its curling spring; he crossed his legs; he interlaced his yellow fingers and put the ends of his thumbs together. Then, looking Mr. Wyborne straight in the face, with every wrinkle showing about his pale blue eyes, he snapped out the words, "Well, sir?"

"I've come to tell you of a serious misunderstanding," began Mr. Wyborne.

"Go ahead, sir," said Rankell, curtly. His manner had quite lost the civility he commonly showed the elderly gentleman, who was a bit confused at the change. Nevertheless, agreeable

to Rankell's bidding, he went ahead, telling at some length what Hastings and I conceived the state of things to be. To him, he hastened to protest, this view was quite incredible.

"Well, sir?" repeated Rankell, when Mr. Wyborne paused.

"I've come to learn the real facts," said Mr. Wyborne.

"I don't see," said Rankell, "but what your friend here has got 'em straight."

"Do you mean to say," asked Mr. Wyborne, with a blank look that anywhere else would have been comical, "that you played my boy this trick?"

"No, sir," said Rankell, emphatically.

"I was sure of it," said Mr. Wyborne, bringing down his stick with emphasis. And he looked at me as if to say that I might take what comfort was to be had in the reflection that I had found a mare's nest.

"I play nobody tricks," asserted Rankell.

"That's just what I said, sir," put in Mr. Wyborne.

“But if a man tries to play tricks on me,” went on Rankell, with a grin, “he is apt to get bitten, sir.”

“That’s proper enough,” said Mr. Wyborne. “A man must defend himself.”

“Well, sir,” said Rankell, dryly, “that’s how your son Howard got bitten.”

“What do you mean, sir?” exclaimed Mr. Wyborne, jumping up.

“Just that,” said Rankell, coolly looking him straight in the face. “There’s no use in getting excited, Mr. Wyborne. The milk’s spilt.”

“Do you mean to intimate,” began Mr. Wyborne, “that Howard —”

“Look here, sir, was n’t he a sort of partner with me in that little transaction?”

“Apparently, something of the kind; but—”

“Well, did n’t he try to get more than his share of the profits?”

“It looks so, sir; but—”

“Well, he did n’t get it. Folks generally don’t when they try that game on me. That’s the whole story, sir.”

Mr. Wyborne did not answer a word. Leaning on his stick, he grew so deathly pale that I thought him faint. I turned to the door, calling for water, but he stopped me.

“Not a drop here,” he said with an emphasis that showed him able to do without it; but he took my arm.

“Look here, sir,” went on Rankell as coolly as ever, “we might as well have the whole thing out. You’re mixed up in this, I suppose.”

Mr. Wyborne, who was moving away, turned back, looking Rankell straight in the eye; and as the little creature blinked impudently back, there came over his wrinkles the sign of a flush.

“I don’t understand you, sir,” said Mr. Wyborne. There was something in his tone that marked the difference between them. I had never, I thought, so felt his dignity.

“I don’t understand you, sir,” he repeated. “I knew no details of what Howard was doing; but I knew what I know still, sir, that I brought him up to be a gentleman.”

“No doubt,” said Rankell. “And I s’pose you’ve lent him money on that.”

“I have,” said Mr. Wyborne. “What is mine is his.”

“Well, he will have to fail, and so will you, for all I see.”

“Our debts shall be paid, sir, whatever happens.”

“All right, sir; though I advise you to take full advantage of the law; it’s common sense. But that ain’t what I had in mind. I’ve got to protect myself, you see; so I shall have to have that mortgage on your place recorded.”

“I might have expected it, sir,” said Mr. Wyborne. “There is nothing but your word to prevent you.”

“Well, sir,” said Rankell, quickly, “don’t I take that back first?”

Mr. Wyborne turned on his heel and strode out of the office thumping the wooden floor with his stick. Anxious lest some serious reaction should overtake my poor old friend, I

hastened after him. And so we left Rankell sitting with crossed legs and interlaced fingers.

Once in the street Mr. Wyborne took my arm, and without speaking tramped hastily along, drawing deep breaths ; but his pace soon slackened, and he leaned on me heavily.

“ ‘Gad, sir,” he said at last, “ I came near losing my temper before that scoundrel. I’ve a devilish bad one ; but I would n’t let it get the better of me there. I must rest somewhere.”

We were passing a large hotel. Spruce fellows stood smoking on the untidy marble porch, while within the office a bustling crowd of porters and buttoned boys and travellers and what not were scurrying about the tessellated pavement ; but as no other resting-place was at hand, I led him in. There for a while he sat listlessly in a stained red leather arm-chair that was screwed to the wall near one of the plate-glass windows. After a little rest he asked me kindly to bring him water. “ Would not wine do better ? ” I asked. From our seats

we could see a part of the neighboring bar-room, whence came noisy talk and the tinkle of glasses. But he shook his head; so, not wishing to oppose him, I brought water in a plated goblet that stood near at hand. From this, after curiously looking at its cheap ornamentation, he took a sip or two. "Iced water," he remarked, "is dangerous to digestion." And thus refreshed, he walked homeward.

On the way he talked, with a calmness that made me doubt whether he fully realized what he said, about the duty that lay before him. All his property must go without delay; and he told me — what I knew before — how the man Cutting had lately come with some offer for the old place that he had expected always to keep. As we parted at his door he turned to me with words of thanks for what he called my kindness; and then, holding my hand, and speaking in a doubtful tone, he said that he should venture to trouble me just a little more. He was tired out; he must rest. Should I mind

calling on Cutting with word that his offer might now be considered?

To Cutting then I went. I found him in a huge beehive of a building, with half a dozen elevators to carry whoever would go to the upper cells. He received me curtly, and did not mend his manners when he heard my business. He was playing with a pocket-knife, whose handle of crinkled brown bone protruded from his fat knuckle.

"The offer's not open," he grunted, as he scraped his pudgy finger-nails. "It looks now as if the gentleman that talked to me could get the thing cheaper. The moral of that is that when you get a chance you nab it, if you've got any sense."

With such satisfaction as this maxim might afford I turned to go. Cutting, still staring at his finger-nails, whose appearance seemed to afford him much satisfaction, called after me: "See here, sir. I don't know but what you might as well tell Wyborne who the gentleman was. It was Mr. Rankell."

XII.

How the Wyborne property was sold, root and branch, I need not tell in detail. Not a bit was reserved. Mr. Wyborne held that his honor was pledged, and that no technicalities should be permitted to protect anything that might help redeem what obligations Howard or he had incurred. Where the town house went, or the furniture, or the paintings, or the wine (that half the clubs in the country bid for), does not concern us. But sure enough, when the old country place, that was most precious of all, came under the hammer, it was Rankell that began the bidding; and as nobody cared to bid against him, he had it for what he pleased.

Once in possession, he made clear why he wanted it. The place, as it had stood, with a great house and grounds and farms, much in the English style, was, as Howard had affirmed, fit only for a gentleman. But in no great time

Rankell had changed all that, and made the place what, if it had ever been, it had not been for years, — a paying piece of property. An army of laborers were set to work. Farms and lawns and gardens disappeared ; the old trees that had been Mr. Wyborne's pride and the new ones that he had expected to be the pride of his descendants, were chopped alike into fire-wood ; and a whole town of spruce little houses, each with a breathing-space about it, sprung into existence along the broad streets with sentimental names, which Rankell's workmen laid out in the rectangular fashion dear to the American heart. A better place of residence for well-to-do shopkeepers and the like, whom the railway took back and forth from town in less than an hour, could not be imagined. To cap the climax, Rankell undertook personally to manage all the business of the place ; so, thanks to his capital and his management, the cost of living was lower there than anywhere else. Deserving people of the middle class flocked to the town in any number you please.

Rankellville, as it was called, soon grew famous in its way. Rankell's proceedings there impressed the public as a nobly philanthropic use of fortune; he won untold praise, too, by rigorously forbidding the sale of intoxicating drink within the limits of the township. Travellers from abroad went to Rankellville and discussed its merits in newspapers and reviews; and people generally held that a more admirable and successful experiment had not been tried for years. So, as the small man walked down town, and sat of a Sunday in St. Peter's, he was looked at with fresh respect. He was not only the richest man in the city, but perhaps the most conspicuous benefactor of his kind.

There was one feature of the town, however, which nobody could understand. In the middle of one of the square blocks the old Wyborne house was left untouched; and the land about it, though fenced in, was not at all improved. So as Rankellville grew and prospered, there remained in the midst of its extremely modern life this curious spectacle of a square country

house, with closed blinds and constantly more dingy paint. So it stood for a good while, with the few stray trees about it which the plan of the town permitted to survive; and what had once been the garden grew to be a tangled mass of weeds. At last some boys, who had made an entrance to the cellar, and taken to holding high festival in the empty rooms, managed somehow to drop a lighted match in an inaccessible corner. In half an hour the house was in ashes and the trees had their death-scars.

There was painful speculation in Rankellville as to what Mr. Rankell would say. Everybody was surprised, however, when he simply remarked that the accident had saved him the trouble of pulling the old thing down; and he went on to leave the vacant block as uncared-for as ever. So as Rankellville grew and prospered, all that was left to remind you of what had once been in its place was the blackened cellar full of weeds and cinders, that marked the spot where the old Wyborne house had stood.

XIII.

AND now that I have told something of how the Wybornes lived, and of how Rankell saw and coveted what they had, and so wove his web about them until he had it for himself, and of what use he made of it when it was his, I am tempted to think that, imperfectly as my work is done, the time is come to leave these matters. But perhaps, after all, this is where I may best set down what more I have to say concerning Mr. Wyborne and his children.

Their case, of course, gave rise to much talk and much sympathy. To be sure, people said, it was their own fault; Mr. Wyborne's imprudence and Howard's folly had been unparalleled. And this generalization was so comprehensive, and withal so easy to repeat, that it soon came to be accepted as an adequate version of what had happened. But, after all was said, the fact remained that their imprudence and folly had no shade of dishonor; and

then everybody had liked the Wybornes, and had freely taken what they gave in the days of their prosperity. So for a while there was talk of helping them,—of buying a house somewhere, and subscribing enough to keep them in comfort. When this came to Mr. Wyborne's ears, however, he quite lost his temper, declaring that no Wyborne had been a beggar yet, and that none should be in his time. They were not penniless, he went on to state; Anna had a little something from her mother. To be sure, he was grieved to say, he had managed her property ill; but still there was enough, thank God, to support them until he found something to do. So pray let him hear no more of help.

This disheartening reception of proffered kindness made the first of the breaches that began to grow between the Wybornes and their old friends. The benevolent ladies who had taken the matter of helping them in hand put up their purses in a dudgeon. To use no stronger term, Mr. Wyborne's conduct was very extraordinary,

and one who will not take a friendly hand must not expect a friendly smile. Mrs. Henderson, too, who at first was all kindness, and offered her house to them as long as they would stay in it, was much put out at the rebuff she had. To be sure, she had thanks and to spare ; but they would rather shift for themselves. At least, she hoped, they would let her offer a home to Anna. Well, that was as Anna pleased ; she was free to choose for herself. And Anna chose to stay with her father and Howard.

“ In short,” said Mrs. Henderson to whoever would listen, “ their behavior is quite unconscionable. Of course their case is hard, and I am sure they have all our sympathy ; and if they come to actual want, — as there’s no earthly reason to suppose they won’t, — we shall do our duty by them. But it will be a thankless task. The truth is, my dear, it takes character to bear misfortune ; and we all know the Wybornes.”

So the Wybornes displayed their signal want of character by taking quarters in an out-

of-the-way boarding-house, where they found reasonable comfort within the means that what was left of Anna's property afforded. There was little enough left, though. Mr. Wyborne had undertaken the care of his daughter's estate, and though he had cared for it as well as if it had been his own, he had cared no better, for the excellent reason that he did not know how. Year by year, then, it had shrunk along with his. Now at last he was more than willing to put what remained into skilful hands. On this they lived, obscurely but not unhappily; and Howard, who was hopelessly stricken, had every care that his father's and his sister's self-denial could afford him.

XIV.

THUS cut off from their old surroundings, the Wybornes liked to see me, whom accident had kept near them throughout their troubles. I often went to their lodgings, then, of an evening, sure of a welcome as hearty as of old.

This welcome, indeed, went far to repay what little trouble the visits cost me; but I am bound to confess that the cigars Mr. Wyborne gave me in these days were enough to put my friendship to a test. The three had a dingy little parlor, up two flights of stairs, with a bronzed chandelier, and furniture that was not comfortable to sit on. Howard always had the lounge. He would lie there stupidly, with fat, white face and ragged beard, now and then complaining a little; but as he spoke with difficulty, he was apt to lie pretty still, and often fell asleep.

“I sometimes think the boy is in luck,” Mr. Wyborne would say. “Half the time he does n’t seem to realize what has happened. The other day he asked when we meant to go out of town. I did n’t correct him. There was no use in making him uncomfortable. Of course he did n’t mean to bring us to this.”

At other times he talked more cheerfully.

“You have no idea, until you try it,” he would say, “what a tolerable life people live in

this kind of place. I had a notion it would be frightfully dull, and it's not a bit. The table-talk is uncommonly good. There is a man here who used to be a consul in Japan or somewhere, — very widely informed, tells a capital story. And there is a queer old woman — not at all the kind you meet in society — who has seen no end of life and says the drollest things. Anna, do you know it occurs to me that Mrs. Finch may have been on the stage. She reminds me of a Miss Something-or-other — I forget the name — whom your mother thought the best Lady Teazle she ever saw."

Meantime he would stoutly declare that he should soon find something to do, and so help matters along. But this something to do never turned up; and indeed I suspect he rarely went farther in search of it than the side of his marble-topped table, over which Anna had spread a pretty cloth. Here he would sit, puffing his cigar, or reading a stray book; and reflecting, so far as you could judge from his occasional remarks, that it was high time to

bestir himself, and that he was quite ready to do so. The marvel was, as time went on, that he had managed to keep off the catastrophe as long as he had.

It was on Anna, then, that more and more the charge of affairs fell, and she bore it in a way that surprised me; for up to this time she had never known what it was to want anything, or even to be contradicted. I remember a speech of Mr. Wyborne's when she was growing up, that to my mind augured ill for her when she should be grown.

"It's a bad plan, I know," he said, "to let a child do as it pleases. But if it doesn't please to do what it should n't, you can't interfere without making it bad. If Anna was a boy, I believe I should rather like her to get drunk. A man without a touch of wild oats isn't exactly human, though you can't feel quite that way about a girl. Or if she were *dévôte*, — a female prig, you know, — there would be something to do. But she is nothing of the kind. She likes a good time — riding

and dancing and small-talk — with the best of them. Only somehow she manages to stop of her own accord just where she ought. So what the devil can I do ?”

Without the intimacy of paternity it was impossible as well as unmannerly to contradict him. I doubt, however, whether anybody shared his view of the pretty young woman. To common eyes she seemed a fly-away little body, up to her ears in the rush of society, always eager for the last new gayety, dressed at heaven knows what expense, and systematically spoilt from the day she was born. When the trouble came, then, I for one looked for grumbling from Anna. In all likelihood, I thought, the hardest change for her father to bear would be the change in her. Yet, after the first shock was over, and she had reluctantly become convinced that Rankell was in no way amenable to the criminal law, you would hardly have known from her bearing that there was any change at all. There was but one marked difference in her: from having worn such gay clothes as I believe she would

never have had if her mother had survived to keep an eye on her, she took to wearing gowns so simple that you could never tell whether it was one or another.

Often smiling, now and then singing a snatch of some song as she sat and sewed, she seemed as happy and as thoughtless as ever. But in little ways I could see that there was no real thoughtlessness about her; she took care that her father should never sit long brooding, and to Howard she was the best of nurses. I have seen her arrange his pillows for the hundredth time when he complained that he could not lie comfortably. And every day she would read to him, chiefly from the newspapers,—for when he felt strong enough to think of anything but himself, he was constantly more anxious to know what was going on in the world. Particularly he liked to follow the ups and downs of stocks, uttering with his heavy tongue sage remarks as to what great things he would have done if his confounded luck had not laid him up.

And Anna would read and listen to him as if she cared about such things herself. The only change I saw in her was, that she grew thin, and the veins swelled in her white hands, and her forefinger grew rough with the sewing she insisted on doing for herself.

At last, however, another change came. She began to protest, as I had expected at first, that this hum-drum life was depressingly dull. Before long, though, I found out that this was a subterfuge. She had always been fond of music, and had been well taught; now, for mere distraction she said, she chose to put her accomplishment to use. She tried singing once at a private concert where Mrs. Henderson consented to find her a place. But as she chose some simple German songs, and as a dashing young woman followed her with a rollicking English one, stamped with the approval of the Prince of Wales, she had little success. In the end, then, she preferred taking pupils, who soon occupied much of her time. And thus, while Mr. Wyborne, who grew rusty in his wits,

seemed not to realize what she was about, she eked out what scanty living her little property brought them.

XV.

It was about this time that Tom Henderson came to the Club one night with a story that he for one thought highly comical. Strolling somewhere after dark, he had been attracted by a pretty little figure making its way through a crowded street without a protector. The chivalrous courtesy that always marked Tom's relations with the other sex impelled him at once to make chase, with a view, in case his attentions should not be repulsed, to supplying, at least for the moment, this lack so deplorable from the point of view of etiquette.

"So off I went after her," he said, "and before long she twigged and did n't seem to like it. So we had a regular race, till at last I caught up with her under a lamp-post. And, by Jove! it was Anna Wyborne! Well, I had sense

enough to pretend I'd known her all along, and she made believe she believed me. I saw her home. She's devilish pretty, I tell you, — prettier than she ever was before."

Among the listeners to this anecdote was Dick Hastings, whom I observed, when the group separated, to call Henderson aside. In a neighboring corner they engaged in pretty serious talk; but Henderson, who, to do him justice, was the most good-tempered of men, seemed by no means as much in earnest as Hastings.

"Well, my dear fellow," he said in the end, rather petulantly, "I admit it, don't I? Perhaps I should n't have mentioned the thing."

"There's no 'perhaps' about it," said Hastings, whose voice rose too. Nobody else was left in the room.

"Oh, — it!" said Tom, angrily.

"And I beg," went on Hastings, "not only that you will mention it no more, but that you won't go near her." And with that he left him.

This proceeding annoyed me. Hastings was right, to be sure, as usual; Tom had acted abominably. But what business was that of Hastings's? In the last days of the Wybornes' fortune, as I have told, Hastings had devoted himself to Anna conspicuously enough to make people whisper that he was trying comfortably to feather his still bare nest. Then, when the crash came, he had behaved very decently, joining with one or two more of us in doing what we could to help Mr. Wyborne through his perplexities. And then, when he had done just enough to prevent people from remarking any discreditable change in his conduct, he had suddenly stopped going near the unlucky family. I never saw him at their lodgings; and from questions that Mr. Wyborne had asked me, I was sure that they knew as little of Hastings as if he had never been a close friend. At the very moment when, according to my notions, he should have come forward to offer Anna what comfort his devotion could give her, he had civilly bowed and walked away.

There was nothing in his conduct to lay hold of; so far as I knew, he had been fortunate enough not to have committed himself. But surely his behavior gave him of all men no right to play champion to the woman he had coolly left without defence. I never liked the self-centred fellow, and liked him the less for this parade of uncompromising virtue. Still, the matter was no affair of mine. If he chose to quarrel with Henderson, he was at liberty to do so.

XVI.

A LITTLE after this I found the Wybornes one night in a state of high excitement. Quite unannounced, a document had come to Howard, setting forth how, in recognition of his distinguished services in the army, his grateful Government had granted him a pension for life. This, I suspect, was a godsend to the Wybornes. For Howard's illness grew costly; and Mr. Wyborne still found "something to do" easier

to talk about than to find; and what Anna earned, even with what her little property brought them, was no great matter. But some evil impulse had set Mr. Wyborne to inquiring how the Government had ever come to think about them; and when I happened in upon them they had just found out that the pension was due to the kind offices of Mr. Rankell, who had recommended it to a statesman of his acquaintance.

This unlooked-for benevolence caused the first quarrel I ever knew them to have. For Anna was for taking the money; it was no gift, she said, but honestly won by years of fighting, and what road it came by was no concern of theirs. But Howard had raised himself on one elbow, swearing in his thick speech that he would rather starve than touch a cent that came from Rankell; and Mr. Wyborne had taken his side.

My coming did not disturb them; they were beginning to grow careless. Already the letter was sealed in which Howard had

managed, with no small pains, to scrawl his refusal of the proffered gift. And Anna was begging him not to send it; for they were coming to need all they could honorably get.

“That’s just it,” said Mr. Wyborne, who was tramping up and down the little room. “If you think we can honorably take what that scampish fellow pleases to fling us, you forget who brought us to this, and you forget — God forgive you — the old place and what has happened to it. Thank God, we’re not paupers yet. And if we were, we could hold our heads up.”

“But, papa,” sighed poor Anna, “we need it.”

“Anna, we need nothing, I tell you,” retorted Mr. Wyborne. “We need nothing so long as we keep our honor. If you weren’t a woman you would understand me.”

In the old times Mr. Wyborne had been fond of declaring that no woman ever knew what honor means.

Poor Anna’s eyes were swollen with tears;

and even now that I was by she could hardly keep back her sobs. She had had, she began to say, as much as she could bear; heaven knew she had done her best.

And so it went on. As soon as might be, I left them, still angry. And thus, for once, a pension was refused.

XVII.

IT was a little later that Hastings, who had grown very brief in his intercourse with me, surprised me one day by abruptly asking if I could tell him how matters were going with the Wybornes. I made no scruple to tell him that they were going very ill, and to give some account of this last scene, so new in their life, that bade fair to be no strange one in future.

“H’m,” said Hastings, with irritating coolness. “It’s too bad.”

XVIII.

AND now comes the end of this little drama. One night, soon after this, I was alone in my room, thinking of bed, when there came a rap at my door, and in walked Hastings. There was a frankly joyous look in his face that I had never seen there before.

“It’s very late,” he said. “But I know you will like to hear what I have to tell you. I am going to be married to Anna Wyborne.”

With that, he held out both hands; and I took them and wrung them, though in my surprise I hardly realized what he said. And after that we sat together, late into the night, and he told me all his story; for I had been the best friend of her people, and for his part he had no near friends of his own. And as he talked on, I began to understand how all the time I had read him wrong.

For he told how, from that first visit to the old house, years ago, he had felt, when he saw

the merry little girl who had tried to treat him kindly and was wounded for her pains, that he should never love any one but her. Yet when he thought of his clumsy self, and of the poverty of his people, he had known how little he was worthy of such a prize; and it was without hope that he had let himself dream of her through his hard-working college life, and after that in the army. Then one night he had been seized with a belief that in a battle that was coming he should surely fall. Of this he had felt so certain that, gathering courage, he had gone to Lawrence Wyborne, whose quarters were near by, and had told Lawrence all his story. He could not die, he felt, without one word of farewell to her who alone made the world hard for him to leave. Lawrence had smiled at his fears, speaking kindly of hopes that Hastings's love might not go unrewarded. But he had promised that if the worst came Anna should surely know how the lover who had never spoken had loved her. Then the battle came, and it was Lawrence himself

who fell. And Hastings brought home what news of his friend was left to tell, and so always had a welcome in the house where he loved to go.

But as the shock of grief wore off, and Anna began again to lead the life she was used to, she had drawn away from him. He must plod at his profession, struggling for the livelihood that nothing but work could bring him, while she laughed in what seemed to him a round of empty folly, listening to the pretty speeches of fellows who learned their arts of pleasing in company far different from hers. Then Hastings had set his teeth, and worked until he had begun to win himself a name, hating all the while every one to whom she spoke kind words ; for his was a nature that could have but one great passion, and that distorted all things else. There were times even when he thought her growing unworthy of the love that, without speaking, he gave her. It was only now and then, in quiet hours like that in which their talk had been broken by Howard's coming with the news of ruin, that

he had found her still gentle and sweet and simple. Yet what slight words she spoke in such rare times as these, that had seemed passing, were ever a fresh inspiration for the work he was doing.

Then, when the crash came, he had helped her people with a full heart. And one day, finding her alone, he had dared to tell her all, begging her to rest on him, and so escape the trials that were coming. He had begged that he might help her father too; his work was winning money now, and there were none to depend on him. But she had shaken her head and closed her lips, turning pale. If matters had fallen otherwise, she could not tell; but now her duty was with her own people. They must stand together, and honor bade them stand alone; so, as he loved her, let her hear no more of this.

He had taken her at her word. For months that had lengthened into years he had worked on, watching her as he could, but giving no sign, and resolved to give none until the end.

At worst it was only what he had known from the first, — even in her sorrow, he was not worthy to help her. He had never doubted that, for all their trouble, her people were free from want. And so he had worked on, prudently, as we thought, feathering his empty nest.

But at last, when what I said gave him a glimpse of the misery that was coming to her, he had gathered courage to disobey; and going timidly to her lodging, he had found her alone. Then he had spoken again. He asked for nothing but that she would let his life-work, that was bringing him fortune at last, be brought an offering to her in need. Let her take of it, never saying whence it came, until at least she and hers wanted for nothing. It was hers by right; for she alone, all unknowing, had made him win all that he had.

Then Anna had said nothing, but with eyes full of tears had held out her thin hand. And reverent and amazed, for he could not bring himself all at once to know his happiness, he had drawn her slowly to himself; and beneath

her dark hair he had been suffered to kiss the scar that when she was a little child he had unwittingly made.

XIX.

THERE is little more to tell here. It was not long afterward that with one or two more I saw the quiet wedding that began for those of whom I have been writing a new life. In the house where they lived together I saw them often in time to come. There, by and by, poor Howard's life flickered out in peace. And as Anna bore children, and they grew big enough to play about the chair whence Mr. Wyborne rarely moved now, it seemed to me that he had never, in his most prosperous days, been so full of the gentle courtesy that made us love him. So, with his new children about him, he glided on toward his end, speaking, when his thoughts and his speech were not gently at rest, chiefly of those olden times of which we all, and he most of all, loved to think.

III.

THE LOTTIMERS.

I.

THE second of my three stories deals with the fortunes of Mr. Joseph Lottimer, for many years confidential clerk at Rankell's. Of him I personally knew very little, and of his family, who play a good part in the story, less still. But a knowledge of what they were like, and of what befell them, came to me in this way. For a long time an old friend of mine has practised medicine in a suburban town where his father practised before him. With this quiet career he commonly seems contented; but now and then, at intervals that are growing longer, he is seized with a desire to stretch himself, as he expresses it. So he turns up in town with an eager appetite for such news as does not get into the papers.

On one of these flying visits, when he chose to put up at my lodgings, I told him, over a

pipe and a glass of spirits and water, something of what had happened to the Wybornes ; he had known the boys at college. In return he professed to have a tale about some patients of his that would more than match mine, and a tale, oddly enough, that concerned one of the chief actors in that of the Wybornes, — namely, Rankell. So in a graphic way of his own he proceeded to tell me the story of the Lottimers.

Much as he told it I shall tell it here, adding perhaps a few things that came otherwise to my knowledge, and perhaps, too, filling in some degree what outlines of the story seem too bare. For these people, I find, are grown very real to me ; and very likely I do not always distinguish between matters as they must have been and matters that I know for a certainty.

II.

IN a small way of his own Mr. Joseph Lottimer was a well-known man. If everybody in town knew Rankell, everybody at Rankell's

knew Mr. Lottimer, the confidential clerk. Besides, he lived in a suburb where society was simple enough to entitle him to prominence as a leading member of the Baptist Church.

His position at Rankell's, where he was expected to keep an eye on everybody, from cashier to cash-boy, was a rather delicate one. But Mr. Lottimer attended to his duty in so simple and unpretentious a way that he was never unpopular. If any one was puzzled and came to him for advice he was always ready with the best advice at his disposal. And though no jurist, he was in his own way a good case-lawyer. If there was a precedent he always remembered it; if there was none he naturally appealed to Rankell, and never forgot the decision.

One Christmas Eve he had been interrupted in the act of putting on his coat, and requested to step into the counting-room. There he had found a considerable company assembled; and one of the book-keepers, who was thought to possess a vein of eloquence, had made a speech,

requesting him to accept as a token of good-will and prosperity from the employees of Rankell's a beautiful Christmas gift, consisting of a silver ice-pitcher and goblets. These, the spokesman declared, the donors hoped would flourish for years in Mr. Lottimer's unbroken family circle. The ice-pitcher was not silver, but plated; and together with the goblets and the waiter on which they stood was decorated with roses and acorns intertwined with an Arabesque design, which merged in handles representing something with the head of a sphinx and the tail of a Renaissance Triton. But Mr. Lottimer had fairly broken down at the sight of this unexpected tribute to his character. With red face and stammering voice he had assured his friends that he should never forget this delightful occasion; he trusted he should prove himself worthy of it; he should always be happy to see them if they visited his neighborhood. And after much hand-shaking he had borne off the elegant testimonial, as he called it, to be thenceforth the most treasured ornament of his parlor.

Mr. Lottimer's career was quite free from mystery. If his friends in general knew no more than that he was Rankell's factotum, it was because they never inquired further. You could hardly talk with him for half an hour without learning what few facts there were in his history.

His father, an Englishman, had been a ship-master. In this part of the world he appeared early in middle life, and after the manner of those who follow the sea presently married a native. When not away on a voyage he lived good-naturedly with his wife in a small house on the outskirts of the city, and now and then he sent home money. At last, when Joseph was a small boy, the captain sailed away for good and all. There was a story, which Joseph firmly believed, that he had been lost overboard in a gale. Another version of his fate was that he preferred another family, which he cultivated in the neighborhood of Liverpool; but this was only scandal.

The widow, a gentle, uncomplaining woman,

managed to support her child decently by going out as a monthly nurse. In this capacity she became very popular; and to the end of his life Joseph Lottimer took much satisfaction in telling how he had known, in their earliest infancy, some of the most prominent people in town. His range of social anecdote, indeed, gave him among people he met casually a reputation, that he would have been the first to disclaim, of having seen better days. For his part, he was innocently proud of his own success.

He had been sent to the public schools. Then, when he was twelve or fifteen years old, the husband of one of his mother's clients had given him a small place in a wholesale store. Here he proved himself so valuable that by the time he was twenty years old his salary was sufficient to enable his mother to retire from active life. So they took rooms together in a decent boarding-house kept by a motherly old lady named Jones. This Mrs. Jones, who often talked of a son that was gone West, had a pretty daughter, who helped keep house and made eyes

at the male boarders. But Joseph Lottimer was too good a son to permit himself more than passing interest in anybody but his mother. So, surrounded with every attention, Mrs. Lottimer lived much respected until one night she quietly died of heart-disease, at the age of sixty-three.

Joseph's heart, thus lacerated, was for the moment peculiarly sensitive. Naturally enough, then, he proceeded to fall in love with pert Miss Rhoda Jones. For a while she was disposed to laugh at her diffident admirer. Her smiles she reserved for a spruce young man of business who frequented the house. But one day this young man unexpectedly married somebody else; and the effect of this union on Miss Rhoda was such that before long she was engaged to Joseph Lottimer. There was no reason for delaying marriage. Mrs. Jones was quite satisfied with the match; and Joseph, who had just gone into Rankell's employ, had a capital salary. So they were immediately married, and lived on at Mrs. Jones's much as they had lived before.

The chief difference was that Mrs. Rhoda

Lottimer was by no means as cheerful a person as Miss Rhoda Jones had been, nor yet so easy to satisfy as her elderly predecessor in Joseph's affections. Before long the trouble was explained. She was prematurely brought to bed of a boy who did not live, and who came near proving the end of his mother. It was Joseph's devotion, indeed, that brought her through the illness ; for Mrs. Jones, who had little head, gave herself over to laments. Joseph passed every moment he could spare from Rankell's at his wife's bedside. The power of caring for the sick that he inherited from his mother served to keep hope alive in Rhoda's mind. And when at last, after weeks of critical illness, she reached a condition where the doctors pronounced her out of danger, she seemed to feel that it was her husband alone who had saved her. She rose up at last, looking ten years older than she was, and without the pert gayety that used to be her most salient quality. But she was changed in more ways than one ; from the day the fever left her, and she first asked Joseph to kiss her

thin face, she seemed almost to worship the prosaic husband at whom she used to laugh.

For a long time little varied the life of the Lottimers. Old Mrs. Jones had a stroke of paralysis that closed the boarding-house and ultimately sent the whole family out of town. There, in the suburb where my friend the doctor practised, they lived for years, with growing respectability. A second stroke disposed of Mrs. Jones. And two children, a boy and a girl, were born to the Lottimers, and survived the allotted dangers of infancy. The girl's career had been wholly uneventful; her chief characteristics being a fondness for finery which her father's improving circumstances enabled him to supply, and later a promising soprano voice, cultivated at a city conservatory.

Her brother, who was some years older, was less fortunate. As a small boy he was vigorous in every way; but one unlucky day his father was teased into taking him to town, with the understanding that he should take good care of himself, and without leaving Rankell's

should keep out of the way during business hours. In his efforts to do so the youth wandered to the third story of the store, whence he managed to tumble down the shaft of the elevator, landing on his head. Though he was picked up for dead, his unusual physical vigor pulled him through the illness which resulted from his severe concussion of the brain ; but he was never quite like other people.

Before the accident he had been a fair scholar for his age, and his father had cherished an idea of sending him to college. But his fall seemed to knock all power of learning out of his head. He grew very large and powerful in body ; in off-hours he was fond of straying into the company of laborers, who were astonished at his feats of strength ; he would often lift weights that staggered two ordinary men. But he was very slow of wit ; and at last his father abandoned dreams of education, and made bold to ask Mr. Rankell whether a place could be found for Joe in some corner of the establishment.

Rankell asked a good many questions, sent

for the lad, and finally gave him a small position in the carpeting department, where heavy goods needed constant handling. For some years after that, father and son came to town together every morning; and while Joseph Lottimer was busy among the clerks, young Joe passed his days in pulling about and unrolling and rolling up endless carpets. He worked well, he showed no sign of discontent, he never asked for promotion, and Rankell showed no sign of promoting him. Still, Mr. Lottimer always said, Mr. Rankell had been very kind to give Joe any place at all, and the family was duly grateful.

III.

MR. LOTTIMER'S home life was as regular as his life at Rankell's. Supper took him half an hour. Then he re-read the evening newspaper. This, by the way, he always bought of a news-boy; subscription he held extravagant, inasmuch as you could never tell but that you might be prevented from reading your paper.

When his reading was done he commonly fell asleep. Mrs. Lottimer, sewing or knitting, would keep very quiet for fear of waking him. Joe, meanwhile, would commonly twirl his thumbs, staring at vacancy. When a fellow feels tired, there is no sense in moving or thinking; but going to sleep before going to bed, or going to bed before bedtime, formed no part of his life.

Sadie was not so easy to manage. As a little girl, she was sent to bed immediately after supper; but when she grew older it was thought that she might well relieve her mother of the work of washing dishes. So her regular tasks began after those of the rest of the family ended. She did not assert herself so strongly as to decline this work, but she never lost a chance of complaint; nor did she often manage to wash the dishes without a noise that menaced at once her father's slumbers and the family crockery.

"Sadie!" Mrs. Lottimer would be heard to call, in a piercing whisper, almost every night.

“Well?” Sadie would answer in a shrill tone.

“’Sh!” would come from her mother, who by this time would be near the pantry door.

“What’s that you say?” would come back from Sadie, in a higher key than ever.

“You’ve got to keep quiet. Father’s asleep.”

“Well, I ain’t making any noise.”

“Yes, you are. He jumped just now.”

“So he did,” Joe would grunt, “and said ‘What’s that?’ I heard him.”

“Keep quiet, Joe,” Mrs. Lottimer would say despairingly. “You’ll wake father yourself.”

“I guess it’s him, not me,” would come from Sadie.

“If you don’t keep quiet,” poor Mrs. Lottimer would sigh, “I don’t know what I shall do.”

“If you want folks to wash dishes so as you can’t hear ’em,” Sadie would retort, “you’ll have to get deaf.”

Whereat Mrs. Lottimer, with offended dig-

nity, would softly close the pantry door ; while Sadie's voice might often be heard through the thin partition, singing hymn-tunes in a muffled crescendo.

All this time Mr. Lottimer, quite tired out, would slumber on. He never waked until half-past nine. Then he would start up, rub his eyes, and exclaiming, " Dear me ! it 's bed-time," would proceed to lock up for the night.

Occasionally, of course, something would vary this routine. The Baptist Church, of which Mr. Lottimer was a faithful member, was by no means so old-fashioned as to confine its energies to spiritual matters. And whenever there was a parish sociable, or an Old Folks' Concert, or a reception of the Ladies' Sewing Society, — as the old Dorcas Society had been rechristened, — the Lottimers were sure to be on hand. Once a month or so, too, Sunday was an unusually great day ; instead of the regular evening service there would be a Sabbath-school concert in which Sadie, whose voice was much

admired, always took a prominent part; while Joe regularly came to grief in an heroic effort to sing bass.

IV.

ONE Sunday a notable concert was to take place. A cantata, based on the story of Samuel, was to be sung in costume. Sadie had been chosen for the part of Hannah, which opened the cantata with a solo devoted to the cause of temperance, and beginning:—

“I am not drunk. I spurn the cup
Wherein the serpent lies.
Wine raiseth evil spirits up
And blinds its votaries.
Strong drink and wine I spurn as foul,
By evil men adored.
For my part I pour forth my soul
Before my righteous Lord.”

The orthodoxy of these sentiments was assured by a note on the programme referring the curious to 1 Samuel i. 15. A cantata in costume, it was felt, required extraordinary Scriptural support.

The Lottimers looked forward to this entertainment with a delicious mixture of pleasurable emotion. In the first place, as the cantata was to be sung in church, whoever went would enjoy the satisfaction of serving God all the while. At the same time, unlike some devotional exercises, the cantata itself would doubtless be interesting; and Sadie's performance would do credit to the family. As for Joe, he had only a small part in a chorus of priests, where the defects of his musical method would not be apparent. Altogether, they sat down to early tea in a very comfortable state of mind.

Tea was not half over when somebody rang the door-bell; and Sadie had to leave her biscuit and answer the summons, amid general wonder as to who might be there. It turned out to be a stranger,—a tall man in a soft felt hat and a linen duster. His cheeks were shaven, but he wore a heavy reddish moustache and chin-beard; and he had the air of one always in a hurry.

“Is this Joe Lottimer’s?” he asked, the moment the door opened.

“Mr. Joseph Lottimer lives here,” said Sadie, with offended dignity.

“Are you Sarah?”

“No, sir. My name is Sadie. Who did you wish to see?”

“Named for your grandmother Jones, were n’t you?”

“Yes, I was,” she replied with asperity. The visitor’s address was not engaging. Besides, it was nearly time to start for the cantata.

“Well,” said the stranger, “Sarah was a good enough name for her, and it ought to be for you. Folks at home?”

“They’re going out, sir. You’ll have to call some other time.”

“Some other time,” repeated the stranger, derisively. “If they were to wait till I called some other time they’d have to wait. Here, take my gripsack, will you.”

And handing her a valise, he strode past her

into the house. By this time the rest of the family, catching some sound of the talk, had come into the hall to see what it was all about. So there the stranger met them.

"How'de do Rhody?" he said to the astonished Mrs. Lottimer, and proceeded to kiss her.

Mrs. Lottimer gasped at this unwonted treatment. Mr. Lottimer drew himself up with angry dignity.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"This is your husband, I s'pose," said the stranger, ignoring the question. "How are you, Joe? That's your name, ain't it?" And he held out a big hand.

Mr. Lottimer stood in dismay. His habitual methods afforded no suggestion of how to treat a large stranger who kisses your wife and then makes friendly advances; but Mrs. Lottimer suddenly solved the problem.

"Why, it's William Jones, my own brother, that I haven't seen for years and years!" she exclaimed. And throwing her arms about his neck, she burst into tears.

“Didn’t you know me?” asked Jones. “Well, I don’t know as it’s strange, if I’ve aged the way you have. Yes, it’s me, sure enough, straight from Colorado. Come, we’ve had kissing enough, unless Sarah here wants to begin.”

Sadie tossed her head disdainfully. She had no intention of answering to the name of “Sarah.” So her uncle, having freed himself from the embrace of Mrs. Lottimer, and having shaken hands with his newly found brother-in-law, and having informed Joe that he was a big fellow if he wasn’t handsome, proceeded to announce that he was mighty hungry. Amid incoherent exclamations of welcome, then, from all but the offended Sadie, he made his way to the dining-room and set to with appetite.

Jones — who was one of those Western men that carry with them the atmosphere of a country too big to live in — ate fast, and talked fast the while; and his talk was chiefly about himself.

“Let’s see; when did I write you last? —

St. Louis ? — Oh, yes ; I was talking of going to Arizona. Well, I did n't ; went to Colorado instead." So he rattled on, giving without much method some account of his thirty years' struggle for money, which apparently still eluded him. At one time or another he had lived in pretty much every State west of the Mississippi, always trying his hand at something new, which always proved unsuited to his purposes. At last, he said, he had struck a thing that looked well, and thereupon he had run East to see his relations. They had given him, he was pleased to say in conclusion, a bang-up supper. Thus refreshed, he declared with an air of approval that the Lottimers looked real comfortable.

"I don't feel comfortable at all," put in Sadie. "If we don't start, we shall be late for the cantata."

"Don't you think we had better stay with your uncle ?" suggested Mr. Lottimer, — "we have n't seen him for so long."

"Did n't know you 'd ever seen me," interposed Jones.

“ Well, father ! ” exclaimed Sadie. “ And disappoint all the people ? They can’t have the cantata without me ; and I ain’t dressed yet.”

“ That ’s so,” said Joe, solemnly. And there-upon Mr. Lottimer described the delights of a cantata, suggesting that William would perhaps go with them.

But William, with much frankness, declared that he would see them further first. Go ahead, though ; don’t mind him. He’d stay and talk to Joe.

“ Joe sings, too,” said Sadie ; “ he ’s a Rabbi.”

“ Hell ! ” exclaimed Uncle William, unconscious of the stir his expletive made. “ At his age ? ”

A short explanation corrected his confusion of father and son. Then, as Mr. Lottimer declared he would much prefer staying at home with his newly found relative, while the others were in duty bound to start at once, the two men were left alone, — to talk, or, if they found

nothing to talk about, to digest the apologies with which Mrs. Lottimer took her leave.

V.

MR. LOTTIMER had nothing to say. He could think only of how odd it was to be confronted in his own house with a noisy stranger who treated him as if they were old friends.

Jones, however, was quite at ease. He began by offering his host a cigar.

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Lottimer; "I never smoke."

"Call me Bill," said Jones, biting off the end of his cigar. "—— it, Joe, ain't I in the family? That's what made me want to come and have a talk with you."

"I'm sure we are all very glad to see you," said Mr. Lottimer, civilly. And the conversation lapsed; while Jones produced a match and lighted his cigar with quick puffs.

The cigar once kindled, he looked at the end to be sure it was burning evenly. Then with

a swift motion of the hand he extinguished the match and threw what was left of it on the spotless carpet. Then, blowing a cloud of smoke into the hitherto unpolluted air of Mr. Lottimer's parlor, he jerked out the surprising question, "What are you worth?"

"Why —" said the astonished Lottimer, "I don't exactly know, sir."

"Oh, — figures," said William. "Take it in the rough."

"Well, even roughly, sir," stammered Lottimer, "it's difficult to say all of a sudden." He knew to a penny what he had, and where it was, but common prudence forbade him to tell. Jones's methods of questioning drove him to prevarication. "I've got a little something," he added by way of soothing his conscience.

"Is it ten thousand, or twenty, or fifty? That's near enough for me."

"Excuse me," said poor Lottimer, shifting in his chair, and wishing to goodness that he was at the cantata. "But what do you want to know for?"

"That's fair enough," said Jones. "I've struck a good thing for a man that has a little money to spare, and I want to keep it in the family."

"I'm very much obliged," said Lottimer. "But what little I have is all invested."

"What does it pay?"

"Why—" and Lottimer stammered again.

"Seven per cent?"

"No, sir, hardly that."

"Six?"

"Well—"

"Five?"

"Yes, I should say so as a rule."

"And you're satisfied with that? By thunder!"

"Why, you see, sir, I have to make my investments safe. I can't afford to lose anything. If I should be taken away there'd be nothing for the family but what I've saved and what poor Joe could earn."

Jones blew a huge cloud of smoke with a sort of whistle.

“Well,” he remarked, “you’re what I call a real enterprising kind of man. That’s what you are.”

“I don’t pretend to be enterprising,” protested Lottimer. “Some men can be, and it’s all right. Some men ain’t made so; and it’s no use trying to be what you weren’t intended for.”

“Well, sir,” said Jones, “I don’t set up to know what you was intended for; but if God Almighty didn’t put us Americans in this country so as we might go just as far as we can, I don’t see the use of us at all!”

“It’s all very mysterious,” said Mr. Lottimer, displeased with the vigor of William’s address; “but we can’t doubt it’s for the best—”

“See here, Joe,” put in Jones, with determination, “I don’t mean to let this thing drop right here. Just you listen to me.”

And seating himself at right angles with Mr. Lottimer, with his foot on the rung of Mr. Lottimer’s chair, he began his exposition, emphasizing the chief points by laying his right hand on

Mr. Lottimer's knee. As this hand often held his cigar, and the curling smoke made Mr. Lottimer cough and weep, the chief points were not always so clear as Jones intended. But at the end of an hour or so Lottimer had grasped enough of his brother-in-law's proposition to make him profoundly unhappy; for it set him to questioning all the principles of his existence.

To begin with, Jones admitted that so far he had made little headway in life, "But —— it, Joe," he said, "a man must take knocks if he wants to learn how to give 'em." And he had kept his eyes open right along. This vigilance had at last been rewarded by the discovery of some land in Colorado that was "rotten with silver, sir, perfectly rotten," and yet that had escaped the notice of less experienced adventurers. It was to be had almost for the asking. Unfortunately Mr. Jones was penniless. He needed no more than a beggarly twenty or thirty thousand; but if at that moment he could lay his hand on a beggarly five, he declared that he wished he might die. Under these

circumstances the only thing to do was to hold his tongue until he could borrow what he needed. So the question arose as to whom he should address with a promised certainty of riches. There were plenty of people out West who would have gone into the speculation "even as a flyer, let alone a sure thing;" but, just on the eve of approaching some of them, Jones had bethought himself that nothing would give such commanding dignity to the coming fortune as to have it all in the family. So, as the secret was too precious to be written, he had come posting eastward as fast as steam would carry him, to propose to Lottimer the plan that should place them, kith and kin, among the great and good of the land.

There was a straightforward simplicity about the man, with all his roughness. He did not pretend to be disinterested. "It's a big thing to be rich," as he expressed it, "but it's a sight bigger to have a rich crowd." It seemed wrong not to consider the matter; yet how could you tell that Jones was not mistaken, as he

admitted he had been in the past. To lose money would be dreadful; to neglect a real chance of making a fortune would cause life-long regret. Poor Lottimer took refuge in wishing that Jones had never thought of him, and before long was stupidly wondering how soon the family would return from the cantata.

“Well,” said Jones, testily, recalling him to the puzzling question, “have n’t you anything to say?”

“Yes, yes. It’s very kind of you to propose this.”

“Kind be ——!” said Jones. “Will you come in?”

“Why, sir, it is so unexpected. I must take time to think.”

“You’ll have to look sharp. This thing ain’t going begging.”

But poor Lottimer, who was far too flurried to say yes or no, finally had leave to sleep on it. He would give a definite answer the next evening; and William agreed to pass a day with his sister.

This conclusion was hastened by the opening of the outer door as Mrs. Lottimer returned from the cantata ; and Jones had barely time to remind Lottimer that he must n't talk to her about the matter, — thereby depriving the unhappy man of one means of settling doubt, — when she appeared with Joe. The cantata, they said, had been a great success. Sadie, who had sung beautifully, was taking a walk with a young gentleman who had asked to be introduced. The costumes had been very effective, and several new bonnets had appeared in the congregation. When Mrs. Lottimer had made these statements, and had been assured that the gentlemen had passed a pleasant evening together, the conversation lapsed.

Mr. Lottimer then proposed that they should go to bed ; he would leave a light in the entry for Sadie, who could be trusted to lock the door. And to bed they went, where everybody but Mr. Lottimer was soon asleep. He lay very quiet, for fear of disturbing his wife ; but this dreadful puzzle of Jones's kept sleep from

him. And long after Sadie had come home, with cheerful words of farewell to the young gentleman who had taken a walk with her, Mr. Lottimer lay wide awake listening to the church clocks as they rang the small hours of morning.

VI.

ON the rare occasions in the past when doubtful questions had troubled him, he had settled them by appealing to higher authority. To make up his mind without advice seemed quite beyond his power. So the next day, when his routine business was over, he asked Mr. Rankell for a few minutes' private talk.

"Anything wrong?" asked Rankell.

"No, sir; it's about a little business of my own."

"Did n't know you had any."

"Well, sir, I have n't exactly."

"Glad of it. When a man's got a regular business, I believe in his sticking to it."

"Yes, sir, so do I. This is very unusual; you

see — ” And he stammered, for he felt guilty thus trespassing on Mr. Rankell's time.

Rankell gave him fifteen minutes in the little counting-room, and with the help of leading questions elicited the main facts in less than five. Then, without giving any opinion, he asked a good many questions of detail: where was the land, what was the price, who owned it, and so on. Having informed himself on these points, playing meantime with a lead-pencil and a sheet of paper, he abruptly asked whether that was the whole story.

“ Yes, sir ; I think so. What had I better do about it ? ”

“ In your place,” said Rankell, “ I would n't touch the thing with a ten-foot pole.”

“ Thank you, sir,” said Lottimer, gratefully. “ That's just what I thought myself.”

And leaving Rankell busy with a letter which he began the moment he uttered his advice, Mr. Lottimer withdrew. He was relieved in mind ; prudence was certainly the true wisdom, after all.

That night he told William Jones that he must decline the opportunity so kindly offered him ; and William, little pleased, took the night train for the West, in search of somebody enterprising enough to grasp a fortune once placed in his hand.

VII.

SOME months later Mr. Lottimer read in his paper that there was great excitement in Colorado. At the spot of which Jones had spoken, silver had been discovered in fabulous quantities. A company was organizing to develop what bade fair to be the richest mines in America.

So William had been right, he thought, and timidity had lost him the one chance of his lifetime. If he had listened to William, Mrs. Lottimer could have had her carriage, and poor Joe might have stopped handling carpets, and Sadie might have gone abroad to study. He had been a fool, he exclaimed as he flung down the paper.

“Why, father,” asked Mrs. Lottimer, “what *do* you mean?”

There was no longer reason for secrecy, he thought; the matter was in the papers. So out he came with the whole story of William Jones’s fruitless errand. Mrs. Lottimer listened with despairing shakes of the head; Joe sat silent, as usual; Sadie, it happened, was gone walking with a young gentleman.

“Well, father,” said Mrs. Lottimer when the story was told, “it does seem dreadful; but I s’pose you knew what was best.”

Encouraged by this declaration of confidence, Mr. Lottimer began to defend himself. After all, they knew nothing of Jones’s success beyond what a short despatch in the evening paper told. That spoke only of a company which was going to develop the mine. Everybody knows “there’s many a slip ’twixt the cup and the lip.” Such speculations mostly turn out badly; they look well on paper, but people who touch them burn their fingers. Besides, Mr. Rankell had distinctly disapproved of the whole thing.

To the Lottimers the word of Mr. Rankell had for years been law; this statement, then, was meant to be final. However William might prosper for the moment, he was sure, if Mr. Rankell disapproved of his proceedings, ultimately to come to grief. And, consoled by this thought, Mr. Lottimer would doubtless have fallen asleep as usual, had not Joe uttered an astounding remark.

"If it was me," said Joe, "I 'd 'a' gone dead against what Rankell told me."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked his father, sternly.

"I mean what I say," said Joe. "Rankell ain't going to let anybody else get hold of anything when he 's there to grab it."

"Say 'Mr. Rankell,' sir," commanded Lottimer.

"I'll say what I want to," said Joe.

"Why, Joe," said Mrs. Lottimer, "that ain't the way you speak to your father."

"I ain't speaking to father," said Joe, doggedly. "I'm just talking, and I mean to. I've kept quiet long enough."

“You shan’t say another word about Mr. Rankell,” declared Lottimer. “You know he’s the best friend I have in the world.”

“He ain’t a friend of mine,” persisted Joe, “nor of anybody else at the store. Oh, I’m stupid, I know. I ain’t so bright as other folks. But I ain’t all fool. I can handle carpets, he says, and makes me do it. I can’t help myself; but I can think there while I’m rolling and unrolling until my arms are half pulled out, and no chance of anything better.”

“If you were fit for anything better,” burst out Mr. Lottimer, “you’d have it.”

“All right. I ain’t fit for much. I don’t tumble on my feet, I don’t. I tumble on my head.”

“So he does, poor boy,” said Mrs. Lottimer, by way of mediation, “and gets taken up for dead.”

“I did n’t mean to speak unkindly,” said Mr. Lottimer, relenting at the thought of poor Joe’s mishaps.

“Who thought you did?” said Joe. “’Tain’t in you. It’s you just as much as me that makes me mad when I think and think, rolling and

lifting. It's slave, slave, both of us, — me with my hands, and you with your head. And who gets what comes of it? Rankell, as he sits there and grins."

"Joe is n't well," said Mrs. Lottimer, anxiously. Her husband looked anxious too; such talk as this he thought insane.

"I'm as well as they'll ever let me be," said Joe. "I'm tired out, that's all, — tired out working for him that never says a kind word or anything but work, work, and he'll take the pay."

"Joseph," said Mr. Lottimer, very sternly, "you aren't so strong as if you had n't had misfortunes, and that's all that keeps me from speaking out just as hard as I know how to."

"That's you all over," put in Joe. "You ain't hard on anybody."

"So you ain't," assented Mrs. Lottimer; "it's gospel truth."

"I try and do men justice," admitted Mr. Lottimer. "But I want to say this once for all, and I don't want you to forget it. I'm older

than you are, Joseph, and I've seen more of the world, and gone through more than I hope you'll ever have to. And what I say now I know. The best friend I've ever had, and the best friend you've ever had, is Mr. Rankell."

"And how does he show it?" interrupted Joe. "Making us work and taking his pay for it right down to the bottom. And now when he sees you getting a chance to make a little something and stand on your own legs, he says, 'Stop right there and don't ask why.' And you believe him. You're too trusting not to."

"Go to bed, sir!" roared Mr. Lottimer, jumping up.

"Why, father!" exclaimed Mrs. Lottimer in dismay.

"Go to bed, sir!" repeated Lottimer. "If you say another word I shall say something I shall be sorry for."

"All right," said Joe, doggedly. And he slouched out of the room, leaving his father to tramp up and down like an animal in the menagerie.

VIII.

THE storm blew over, of course. Next day everything went on as usual. But if poor Lottimer's tongue was at rest, his thoughts were not. To have heard Joe express these wickedly mistaken ideas about Mr. Rankell, which he had supposed current only among viciously disposed people quite apart from his own little world, affected him as if drunkenness or other scandalous disorder had turned up in the house. His system, which involved the moral excellence of his immediate surroundings, was upset; scepticism took possession of him. He began by wondering what ground Joe could have for holding such abominable ideas; then came questions as to whether there might not conceivably be grounds for holding them. And though he checked such questions as resolutely as the devout check fleshly thoughts, he could not get rid of them. So he was very unhappy.

Meanwhile he thought it no more than proper

to write William Jones, wishing him all success in the enterprise that was fairly begun. So a letter was sent, with assurances of the affectionate regard of the whole Lottimer family.

A fortnight later a fat envelope directed in a scrawling hand to J. Lottimer, arrived from Colorado. Wondering why William had written so much, Mr. Lottimer opened the envelope. There, to his amazement, he found his own letter, along with the following : —

J. LOTTIMER :

SIR, — All I have read of this letter is the name at the end. I don't want to hear from you or any of your crowd. If there's anything meaner than giving a man away, it is trying to crawl out of it as I suppose you've tried in this letter of yours. We make short work of you kind of men out here, sir.

Truly yours,

W. JONES.

With a face as long as a sermon Mr. Lottimer read this surprising letter to his wife. What it meant neither of them could imagine.

“I know,” said Sadie, who was within hearing. But when her parents turned to her for explanation, she gave no more than, “It means he ’s mad. — I ’m real glad of it,” she added, as she whisked out of the room to escape the wrath her frivolity would have brought down on her. “He ’s a horrid man.”

“He ain’t,” said Joe, who was sitting by. “He ’s square. I ’ll tell you what I think that letter means. It means Rankell.”

And in spite of Mr. Lottimer’s angry objections, Joe went on to expound why he thought it meant Rankell. His father had spoken of Jones’s plan to nobody else, and Rankell always kept his eye peeled for a good thing. He didn’t tell folks to hold back for nothing, either. And now that somebody had evidently got ahead of William Jones, it was only sense to remember that Rankell was famous for getting ahead of everybody.

Scold as he might, and declare as he might that a charge dishonorable to Mr. Rankell was a thing he would not listen to, Mr. Lottimer

could not help feeling that Joe's theory sounded plausible. Mr. Rankell was his best friend, he asserted again and again ; he would not listen to one of these shameful words about such a man. But all the time the shocking things that Joe permitted himself to say stuck in his ears. Finally the poor man began to feel that nothing could set his mind at rest short of personal assurances from his employer that all this wicked talk was false. And in the midst of his angry denials he secretly determined to go to Mr. Rankell with the whole story. Then, with Mr. Rankell's own word to back him, he could put Joe where he belonged. If the boy's damaged head was open to conviction, he could shame him into confessing that these notions were not only wicked but insanely mistaken.

IX.

WHEN the time came, however, for putting this plan into execution, he gave it up. To ad-

dress Mr. Rankell with questions concerning his personal honor would be like asking a woman to give account of her reputation. And matters would probably have rested where they were, giving rise to periodical family squabbles, but for a very trivial accident. This was no more than that the boy who made press copies of Mr. Rankell's private letters happened one morning to be out of the way; so, to save time, Mr. Lottimer began making the copies himself.

Letter after letter he pulled mechanically off the tissue pages where they had left their ghostly images, and folding them, damp and sticky, addressed them with no thought of where they were going. That was no business of his; and besides, his mind was busy with other matters. He was a good deal worried by a whispered rumor, in which he devoutly disbelieved, that his minister was growing too fond of calling on a lady who sang in the choir. It was merely by chance, then, that he discovered himself addressing a letter to the town in

Colorado where William Jones had found his silver. Of course he had no right to draw a conclusion from this fact; Mr. Rankell had business all over the world. Still less right had he to read the letter in question, — a proceeding that violated private correspondence as much as if he had broken open an envelope in Mr. Rankell's morning mail. But Lottimer was excited. Without an instant's reflection he turned back a page of the private letter-book and ran his eye over the blurred copy of Rankell's crabbed manuscript. Then he seized the envelope he had just sealed, tore that open, and with short breath read the letter he pulled out; he must assure himself that the miserable machine had not lied. And there, sure enough, he read some dry directions concerning the very property that had been snatched from under the nose of William Jones.

He grasped the desk beside him, and stood swaying to and fro.

“My God!” he heard a clerk exclaim. “Look at Lottimer!”

In a moment, before he could regain control of himself, a dozen clerks, with well-meant officiousness, had left their desks and run to aid him. They seized his arms, asking what was the matter; they called for water—for a doctor, adding to the misery of his confusion.

“Let me alone!” he cried, with a roughness they had never seen in him before. “Nothing is the matter. I’m old enough to know what I’m about. Mind your business and I’ll mind mine.”

Amid this hubbub Rankell’s door was flung open, and the little man appeared, showing his yellow teeth in a grin of anger.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “What are you all about?”

“Mr. Lottimer—” began half a dozen clerks at once.

“Yes, sir, it’s me,” said Lottimer, in a voice broken by excitement. “I’ve got something to say to you.”

“Say it, then,” snapped out Rankell, “and put a stop to this racket.”

“I’ll say it to you alone, sir,” said Lottimer. “Come into your office.”

The clerks stared. No one had ever spoken so to Rankell before.

“Confound you, sir!” cried Rankell. “You’ll say it where I please.”

But by this time Lottimer had reached the small man’s side and taken his arm in a grip that meant mischief. Rankell had no mind for a violent scene.

“Go to your desks,” he ordered the clerks, who minded him like well-trained dogs. “And you, Lottimer, come with me.” And pretending to lead the way, he let Lottimer force him into the inner office and close the door.

“Let me go!” he commanded, the moment the door was closed.

Lottimer obeyed; in the little room with its bare white walls and its one desk and its ticker the force of habit grew stronger.

Then Rankell sat down in his pivot chair, wheeled it round until it faced Lottimer, and glaring at the unhappy fellow with all the

anger his wrinkled face could show, snapped out: "Now, sir, what the devil does this mean?"

Lottimer stood for an instant with his brain in a whirl. Then he held out the letter which he had kept in his hand.

"What does this mean, Mr. Rankell?" he asked with a sob-like gasp.

Rankell coolly took the letter and glanced at it.

"So you've been reading my correspondence?" he said coldly.

Lottimer stood still. His mind could not work so fast. He had expected explanation: he was not prepared for attack.

"Why don't you answer?" asked Rankell sharply.

"I saw what you wrote there, sir. I could n't believe that it meant —"

"Ha! I might have known you'd be at these tricks. Open the door and call Murray."

Hardly knowing what he did, Lottimer obeyed. Murray was the cashier. In he came, —

a decent man with gray whiskers, and a gold pen stuck behind his right ear.

"Here, Murray," said Rankell, "take this letter and have one of the boys direct it. And draw a check for Mr. Lottimer's salary. He's been prying into my private letters."

"What did you say, sir?" asked Murray, staring. To him, as to all in the office, Lottimer had been as inseparable a part of Rankell as was Rankell's grin. He had been the best part of Rankell, too.

"Draw a check for Mr. Lottimer's salary. Can't you understand the English language? Go with Murray, Lottimer. He'll attend to you."

"I don't understand what this all means, Mr. Rankell," gasped poor Lottimer.

"Don't you?" said Rankell. "I'll tell you, then. When a man in my employ violates my correspondence, I give him a month's salary and make an end of it. Good-day."

"And is that all?" asked Lottimer, foolishly.

"Can't you understand what 'good-day' means?" said Rankell. "Go with Murray."

He pointed to the door; Lottimer staggered out, followed by Murray, the picture of dismay.

"Shut the door," said Rankell, coolly. And as Murray turned to shut it he saw his employer already busy with the paper tape that issued from his ticker.

Meanwhile in the basement stupid Joe was handling carpets as he had handled them for years. In the midst of his work some one laid a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw his father, pale as death, and wearing his hat and coat.

"Joe," he said in a strange, hard voice, "I've been wrong. He's all you said he was; and when I asked him what it meant he turned me off. God help us!" And poor Lottimer broke down and sobbed.

Joe gave the roll of carpet a kick.

"Turned you off, did he?" he asked in his dull way.

"Yes, Joe, turned me off without a word."

"Well, father," said Joe, biting a bit of

cord he had picked up, "it's just what you might 'a' looked for. He's nothing but a grinning old devil."

"God help us!" sobbed Lottimer, sitting on the roll of carpet.

"Don't worry, father," said Joe. "I'll stick to you. Go along home." And he stroked the poor fellow's back as if the father had been the helpless one. And Joseph Lottimer, with a tragic look of misery, rose and walked slowly out of the great store, leaning heavily on his stick.

Joe sat down on the roll of carpet and bit the cord again for a while.

"Now then, Lottimer," cried a salesman, "show this lady number sixteen four fifty-three."

"Show it yourself," blurted out Joe, and went lumbering out of the room amid the amazement of his superiors.

He walked straight to the counting-room, and through it towards Rankell's office. The clerks stared at him, whispering among them-

selves. As he laid his hand on the door-knob, one of them called out that he had better not go in.

"Leave me alone!" said Joe, roughly. And opening the door he could see the wizened little man scribbling at his solitary desk.

As Rankell heard Joe's tread he turned, sharply asking who was there.

Joe stood blinking at him.

"I've got something to say to you, Rankell."

"Who are you?"

"Oh, you know. I'm Joe Lottimer, that's been rolling carpets for you."

"What do you mean by coming here?"

"I mean this — Just you sit still if you don't want a hiding — You've turned off my father —"

"Go to Murray, sir. Tell him to pay you."

"I don't want your money. Keep it. Much good may it do you. I've quit your work; and I've only got just one thing to say to you, Rankell."

"I won't hear you, sir."

“ Yes, you will. It ’s this : Damn you ! ”

And Joe stood for a moment glaring at the frightened little creature who dared not stir in the presence of this half-witted giant. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and turning on his heel went lumbering out of the great store after his father.

X.

IN this tale concerning Rankell there is no need to tell in detail Mr. Lottimer’s efforts to shift for himself. It is enough to know that after vainly trying for some other place, which for want of a good word from his old employer he could never find, he finally opened, in the suburb where he lived, a small shop. For a while this enterprise, which required all the money he had saved, went well. Joe was all help, and so was Mrs. Lottimer, who, with an air of dignity, consented to wait on the counter. Mr. Lottimer would have liked Sadie to help too, but she resolutely declined. She did n’t mean to be a shop-girl, she declared ; whatever

happened she could do better than that. Sure enough, she did; somehow she got a place in a city choir, and so moved to town, where, to do her justice, she asked no help from her father. He had to hire help in her place, though, and wages came hard.

For a time, as I have said, Mr. Lottimer's shop prospered. Everybody in the town knew him, and as no secret was made of his story he had general sympathy. But sympathy is one thing and common-sense another; so when people began to find that in spite of Mr. Lottimer's efforts to keep prices down he could not contrive to sell as cheaply as the great city stores, or indeed as one or two of his competitors, who were suspected to have an understanding with city dealers, his custom fell off. There was trouble about credit, too; he found the effort to manage business for himself very different from managing it under another man's direction. Joe would mind, but he could not advise; neither could Mrs. Lottimer; neither could what assistants he could

hire. In the end he closed his shop pretty nearly insolvent.

About this time an unexpected opening appeared. In the course of his work at Rankell's Mr. Lottimer had come to know some Government officials. One of these, hearing of his troubles, and valuing Rankell's conduct at what it was worth, procured him a small appointment in the Custom House. This he gratefully accepted. He sold the house where he had lived since the children were little, and moved to town, where he decided that a tenement of the better sort was quite good enough for the present state of his fortunes.

Joe, who stuck by his father so long as he could help, now bravely tried to take care of himself, and finding no better chance, was willing to earn what he could by working along shore. Here his strength stood him in good stead, but at the same time excited ill-feeling among fellow-laborers who could not lift as much as he. His temper, too, docile enough at home, sometimes got the better of him abroad ;

and once or twice his difficulties with envious fellows who made game of his slow wits resulted in a free fight. At last he had a six-months' sentence for half-killing a comrade in a brawl. It was the saddest day of Joseph Lottimer's life when he went to see his son in jail. He went with his heart full of anger; but when he found poor Joe blubbering out that it was only for father's sake he was glad he had not killed the fellow, who began the row by calling him a vile name, Lottimer's heart softened.

"Poor boy!" he said. "It's your misfortune, not your fault."

And for all Joe's roughness, he was, even as a jail-bird, as good a son as he knew how to be.

Sadie, meantime, was doing well with her music. Besides her choir-work she had pupils, who obliged her to live in a better way than the rest of the family, and to spend so much for clothes that there was nothing left for anybody else. Occasionally, too, she had a chance to sing at private concerts. It was at one of these that I first saw her.

The concert, indeed, was the same at which Anna Wyborne failed to make an impression, and it was Sadie who overshadowed her. Sadie wore a pink dress with a long train, very effective at a distance; and with a monstrous bush of blond hair frizzled over her forehead, and with things that looked like diamonds in her ears, and with a suspiciously brilliant complexion, she looked, as Tom Henderson was heard to whisper, “pretty — handsome.” She sang with a reckless jollity, quite different from the staidly correct fashion of pale Anna. Everybody knew it was in bad taste, but everybody liked it. After she had finished, Tom, who somehow knew her, made his way to her side. She received him with a saucy little incline of the head to the left; as she talked with him she did not scruple to make eyes over her big fan at other admirers. And long after Anna had gone home with a faint heart, Miss Sadie kept her carriage waiting, while she sat in the dining-room with Tom and others of his kind, amid a profusion of champagne and needlessly loud laughter.

XI.

MR. LOTTIMER worked faithfully ; he was among the first at his desk and the last to leave it. But when it came to the unwritten services on which the tenure of such a place as his depends, he was found wanting. Politically he was useless. One day, then, he was notified that his services were no longer needed. Some politician, I suppose, wanted his desk for a worker.

The day this news came he attended to his duties with an absent air, now and then fetching a deep breath. He did not tell his fellow-clerks what had happened ; nor did he say anything of it when he came home with no appetite for his unsavory dinner. But after dinner, instead of sleeping, as was still his habit, he took his hat and stick, and professing that he had business, passed out into the dark. Two or three hours had passed before he came home ; then he was ready enough to tell on what business he had gone, and what had happened to him meantime.

XII.

HE had made up his mind for one last effort, — the only hope he saw. So he resolutely walked up the lamplit streets until he came to the plain brown-stone house where Rankell lived. There he rang the bell, and timidly — for to him the man-servant in a white cravat was an awful being — asked for Mr. Rankell. Mr. Rankell, the man said, could never be disturbed of an evening. But Lottimer insisted. Relenting a little, the man inquired if he had an appointment. No ; but his business was important, and would take only a very few minutes. In the end the fellow was teased into taking his name to Rankell ; and Lottimer was left standing in the hall, where the sentiments with which for the better part of his life he had regarded the owner, arose to prevent him from sitting . uninvited in one of the empty chairs.

That evening Rankell must have been in a benevolent mood. Any one who knew the

circumstances would have given odds that his answer to Lottimer's request would be a curt refusal to have anything to do with him. Instead of this, the servant came back with mended manners, asking Mr. Lottimer if he would have the kindness to walk upstairs. So, hat in hand, he followed the man up the red-carpeted stairs, to a kind of library smelling of stale cigar-smoke. Here, beside a large walnut table on which a droplight stood amid a loose pile of evening papers, sat Mr. Rankell. As was his habit when reading, his glasses were half-way down his nose; and he looked over them at Lottimer with the venerable air that was growing habitual when he was not busy with his trade. His long upper lip, unshaven since the morning, closed more feebly than it used to; and in the gaslight his yellow hair and beard looked white.

This unexpected benevolence of aspect made his welcome less strange. Without rising he held out his hand.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Lottimer," he said

rather slowly. In all ways, Lottimer thought, Rankell seemed older than he should have believed possible. "Sit down, sir. How does the world treat you?"

"Thank you, sir," said Lottimer with diffidence, "times are pretty hard just now."

"Sho!" said Rankell, almost sympathetically. "Sorry to hear that. You don't smoke, do you?"

"No, sir. Much obliged," said Lottimer.

Rankell, taking up a half-finished cigar that lay extinguished on the edge of the table, proceeded, with the aid of a charred match which he kindled in the flame of the droplight, to relight it. Then puffing out with a slight effort a white cloud of strong-smelling smoke, he looked at Lottimer again over his glasses, as if pondering some significant speech.

"Well, sir," he said after a little pause, "and how do *you* do? And the family?"

"Pretty well, thank you, sir," said Lottimer, fingering his hat.

"That's right," said Rankell. "Health's a great blessing, sir."

These amenities, in themselves agreeable, were by no means what Lottimer had looked for. Nor was either of the gentlemen sufficiently used to purely social intercourse to find the situation quite easy. So, after a preliminary cough, Lottimer boldly started off.

"I supposed you might think it peculiar in me to come here, Mr. Rankell," he began.

"Well, yes, sir," said Rankell, "I was kind of surprised when I heard you were downstairs."

"It was n't an easy thing for me to do, Mr. Rankell."

"All the more credit to you for doing it, sir. I'm real glad to see you, Mr. Lottimer. It shows there's no ill-feeling; and when a man gets to be my age, sir, that's pleasant news."

This turn of the conversation was unexpected. Lottimer shifted uneasily in his seat.

"I ought to tell you, Mr. Rankell," he said, "that I've felt hard."

"So have I, sir," retorted Rankell, more sharply than before.

"And I've said hard things, sir."

“Well, they have n’t hurt me, sir. I guess I can stand all that folks want to say.”

“But there were a good many years, Mr. Rankell, when you and I were good friends.”

“So there were, Mr. Lottimer.”

“And, if I do say it, I served you well, sir.”

“Yes; you did. If I was a younger man, Mr. Lottimer, I don’t know just how I should feel. But I’m getting on in years, and I find it’s the old times that take hold of me the most. That’s why it pleased me, sir, to find you’d come ready to say let bygones be bygones.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that, Mr. Rankell; I feel that way too, sir. And there are times when I begin to think myself that the right was n’t all on my side.”

“I don’t understand what you mean by that,” said Rankell, sharply.

“Why, sir,” said Lottimer, simply, “the whole trouble began when I told you what I’d promised not to tell anybody, and —”

“See here, Lottimer. What did you come for? If it was to fight, the sooner you go

the better. I've got enough of that every day without starting up with you all over again."

"God knows, sir," said poor Lottimer, "I've no wish to fight."

"Well, what the devil do you mean, then, by talking this way?"

"What way, sir?"

"As if you didn't know you were the only man I ever played fool with. I might have known it was only a question of time when I should catch you at tricks that ought to have sent you to jail —"

"Mr. Rankell," interrupted Lottimer, "I'm a poor man, and in a bad way, but I've got self-respect, sir —"

"Confound your self-respect!" snapped out Rankell. "What do you want here?"

Which question brought poor Lottimer to his bearings.

"Just this, sir," he began humbly enough. Then he went on to tell, with much prolixity, how ill his affairs had gone, and how at last his

little place in the Customs service was taken from him.

Rankell listened impatiently. "Well, what's all this got to do with me?" he asked.

"Mr. Rankell," said Lottimer, "if there was anywhere else to turn I would n't come to you. But I don't know any one else to help me."

"Help you! You don't want me to take you back, I hope."

"No, sir. That would n't do for me even if it would for you."

"That's lucky," interposed Rankell.

"But I did hope, sir, that you would n't mind speaking a word for me to the collector."

This word might have meant much, for Rankell was high in the councils of the party in power. And Rankell, knowing this, pursed his lips, and thoughtfully rising relighted his cigar, which had gone out again. Lottimer, meantime, sitting on the edge of his chair, heard thumping heart-beats which curiously mingled with the faint ticking of a French clock on the chimney-piece.

"Look here, Lottimer," said Rankell at last, "I'm a fair man."

"Yes, sir," assented Lottimer, hardly knowing what he said.

"And I don't forget that before you took to your tricks," went on Rankell, "you did good work for me."

"Yes, sir," said Lottimer.

"Well, if I could do anything for you in justice to myself, I'd do it."

"Thank you, sir," said Lottimer, whose heart began to bound with hope.

"But I can't; so there's an end of it."

"Can't, sir? Why not?"

"Why, look here, Lottimer; you know as well as I do that I've got more men in my employ than any dozen could look after properly. Well, if they should find out that I was ready to begin the forget-and-forgive business with a man that violated confidence like you, where should I be? No, sir; it can't be done."

Poor Lottimer stammered something about his family.

“Well, sir,” said Rankell, calmly, “it’s your family, not mine. Time was when you had a chance to support them honestly.”

“Mr. Rankell,” exclaimed Lottimer rising, amazed at himself, “I have supported them honestly, and you know it!”

“I don’t know anything of the kind, sir. I know why I turned you off. That didn’t look very honest.”

“Mr. Rankell,” said Lottimer, solemnly, “you know, and I know, sir, which of us two is the honest man.”

“What do you mean by that?” cried Rankell, in a rage.

“I mean this, sir: I’m a broken man, and a poor one; and what’s coming to me now, and to my wife, and to my boy working like a black slave, and to my little girl — ”

“Aged twenty-three or so,” snarled Rankell, “and going on the stage, I hear.”

“What’s coming to us,” went on Lottimer, “is more than I can tell. But whatever comes, sir, I can look men in the face. For I know,

and you know, and God knows, Mr. Rankell, whose tricks it's owing to."

"He does, does He?" grinned Rankell, showing all his yellow teeth; "then He knows this, sir: you've made your bed, and you've got to lie in it."

XIII.

So, with broken hopes, but knowing more clearly than ever which was the better man, Joseph Lottimer made his way home. There he found his wife, who was growing very querulous; Sadie had happened in, too, and was picking a quarrel with dirty Joe, who sprawled on the sofa.

Still full of excitement he told them what had happened.

Mrs. Lottimer whined an accompaniment to his recital. It was too much to bear; they should end in the poor-house. Mighty little she could do to help along, now that sewing was paid so low. She had done her best.

If other folks had done theirs she did n't see how they could have come to all this trouble.

"Well, pa," said Sadie, "you used to say that where there 's a will there 's a way. Ain't that true any more?"

But Joe, sprawling with half-closed eyes, kept growling out, "Damn him! I wish I'd killed him. I had the chance."

Mr. Lottimer, still rather exalted, kept saying that whatever came he could hold up his head. There was nothing in his life to be ashamed of. And for that he thanked God.

Then, after a while, feeling drowsy, he kissed his thin wife, who made some motion of discontent at the touch of his lips; and crossing infirmly to where Sadie sat he bent over and kissed her forehead, she taking little heed of him the while. But when Joe wrung his hand, the tears came into his eyes.

"Don't worry, my boy," he said kindly; "we will sleep on it. Things will look brighter in the morning."

And so he went to bed.

XIV.

IN the morning there came a great screaming from the room where the old couple slept; and, hurrying thither, the people in the house found Mrs. Lottimer leaning over her husband and crying out very loud. Speak to her, she begged him. It was she, Rhoda, — Rhoda, whom he saved in the old days, — Rhoda, who loved him. She had been wicked, ungrateful. She would never be so again. And resting her head on his breast she kept moaning out his name, “Joe! Joe!”

But he made no answer; for, as years before the mother he cared for so well had fallen asleep never to wake again, so now had he. And he lay there with a look of rest on his pale face. And this was all that most who came thither saw.

But some, who were near Joe, saw too that there was something more than grief in his heavy face as, shaken with sobs, he looked at his dead

father. And they wondered among themselves what he meant when he grumbled, not caring who might hear, that this was murder.

XV.

THERE is very little more to tell. The clerks in the Custom House surprised Mrs. Lottimer by sending an elegant floral tribute to the funeral; still more to her surprise, another came from the employees of Rankell's, who had known Joseph Lottimer so long. But having thus exhausted what tangible sympathy was in them, these thoughtful friends troubled themselves no further about the family he left behind him, and soon could not tell what had become of them.

For a while Sadie was willing to give part of her earnings to her mother; but as these fell off, she found she needed all for herself. Then poor Joe could not earn enough to help much, for times were growing hard and work scarce. At last William Jones, who began somehow to

prosper in the West, had word of his sister's hardship; so, with the benevolent condition that he should never hear her name again, he bought her a place in an Old Ladies' Home, where she querulously went to her end. And Joe and Sadie, after a while, were quite lost to sight.

XVI.

THIS, then, is the story concerning Rankell that my friend the doctor, who had known the Lottimers in their country home, told me, in his graphic way, over our spirits and water. And I have written it down, as nearly as might be, in the manner in which he told it.

IV.

THE CONVENTION.

I.

THE last of my three stories is different from the others. Those have told how Rankell dealt with private men whose path crossed his. This last, which perhaps may be hardly called a story at all, shows him dealing no longer with this man or that, but with those great masses we call the people.

I am no politician. I have little familiarity with the life of which I must here give a glimpse. I have wondered more than once whether the wiser course were not to leave this part of Rankell's story untold. But without it I cannot show all that Rankell means to me. So here I shall set down, as best I may, what in the last years of his life Rankell had grown to be among those to whom he was little more than a name.

II.

IT is now several years since the Hon. William D. Cox was a prominent candidate for the Presidency. By this time, I dare say, he is half forgotten. In war days, however, he was a famous member of Congress, where he first appeared as a poor man. With no other means of support than his office afforded he grew rich. Before long, then, he naturally advanced to the Senate, where his career was much what it had been in the House. In general legislation he took no leading part; his record had no spots that change of public opinion might weaken; but now and then he would deliver himself of what his admirers called a ringing speech in favor of some popular cry. Thus he became popular among the utterers of such cries. At the same time his undoubted good-fellowship made him a host of friends who maintained with truth that there was no better diner-out in America. And people who had irons for the

fire of legislation were unanimous in the opinion that the Hon. William D. Cox was among the greatest of living statesmen.

What with his popularity and his friends and his money, it is not strange that he grew anxious to crown his career with a term or two in the White House. With becoming modesty, then, he caused it to be heralded in the numerous papers at his command that he had retired from public life to pass his remaining years in study at the beautiful home his mysterious wealth had bought; and thereupon his friends went trooping to a Western city where a National Convention was to be held.

Just at this time affairs called me thither, and there I was compelled to stay throughout the Convention. The prospect offered little pleasure. Like many of my fellow-citizens, I held that in the prevailing lack of political issues the coming nomination had no importance. The election itself would decide little more than who should have great dinners at Washington, and who should spend a pretty fortune in Lon-

don or Berlin, and who should handle the mails in this or that country post-office. To me, then, the National Convention, which overcrowded my hotel, presented itself as little else than a personal annoyance.

It was in this mood that among the motley crowd of political people who elbowed me at table I met my friend Robbins. He was a delegate, it appeared, and, bothered by his unwonted occupation, had been looking everywhere for what he called a white man he could blow off steam to. For this purpose he deemed me suitable; he began forthwith to deliver himself of much pent-up feeling that I failed at first to share; wherefore he upbraided me as highly unpatriotic.

This Robbins was a man of easy fortune who in his youth studied law. He never practised, chiefly, I suspect, because during the early years when he still had an office his friends assumed that he did not wish to be troubled with business. So in a private way he turned his attention to public matters, and won in time

the reputation of a thoughtful writer who believed what he wrote. He never held office ; even his admirers deemed him a trifle too much of an idealist for practical life. But by keeping a sharp eye on whoever was in office he had long ago attained a position that made him when a moral question arose in politics one of its natural representatives.

At this moment such a question had arisen. Members of the dominant party who disapproved the career of the Hon. William D. Cox had not been idly watching what was described as the growth of his boom. Black sheep, they admitted, had been suffered before this to stray into the White House, but none so black as he. Now was the time, they loudly said, for honest men to assert themselves. The country must not be dishonored by placing at its head a clever trickster whose career on a smaller scale would have been punished as criminal. We must assert ideals. We must teach a lesson to those who preach that the whole political duty of man is to follow your leader,

no matter who he be nor whither he go. Accordingly there had been more discussion in caucuses than political workers liked. And in the end a good many delegates went West with the avowed purpose of asserting such moral precepts as were taught us in youth with no notion that we should think of putting them in practice.

Among these delegates Robbins was prominent. And most of the steam which he began blowing off to me consisted in such extravagantly ideal parts of their creed as practical wisdom counselled him to keep from the people among whom he was come to do serious work. It was scandalous, he asserted before long, that an educated man like me should listen with so languid interest.

The truth was, I said, that I knew little about such matters. Well, that was equally scandalous, he thought. An intelligent citizen ought to be ashamed of behaving under such circumstances as these like a country minister at a horse-race. He had no idea of letting this go on.

“Now that I’m in politics,” he continued, “I feel bound by custom to be of use to my friends ; and the most useful thing I can do for you is to make you feel like an American.”

Accordingly he somehow secured me a seat on the speaker’s platform, where I could see and hear the Convention from beginning to end. With this prospect, and Robbins’s incessant talk, I grew interested in what was doing about me ; and thus unexpectedly I came to know what gave me my last impressions of Rankell.

III.

RANKELL, it appeared, was come West, as the phrase went, “to boom Cox.” The little man always kept clear of active politics ; he showed no ambition outside of his business. But now and then, though he wanted no office, he appeared — sitting on platforms, and subscribing handsomely to campaign funds — as a stalwart member of a party whose policy helped fill his pockets. Now, he was so eager a supporter of

Cox, that in view of the rising opposition he had consented to come as a delegate to the Convention. For Cox personally, to be sure, there was no reason to suppose he cared a fig; but the astute statesman had pledged himself to recommend certain acts which, however they might affect the country at large, were sure favorably to affect the purses of Rankell and others of his kind.

“Of course the President does n’t legislate,” said Robbins, “but American citizens rarely stop to remember that constitutional truth; and there’s no denying that the President has a great moral effect. That’s why Rankell wants Cox. It’s also what I’m here for.”

The first I saw of Rankell in the West, however, was in no political character. I happened one afternoon to be walking with Robbins about the city that daily grew more crowded; for delegates and the like came by every train to swell the numbers that commonly scurried about. It was a city of endless straight streets crossing one another at right angles, and lined

as far as you could see with clumsy structures of stone or iron covered with gilded signs. Here and there were huge public buildings, mostly incomplete, and uglier, if so may be, than the public buildings we were used to at home.

“There is a compensating justice,” Robbins observed, “in the fact that nothing can make a job look handsome in America.”

In the streets were horse-cars and cable-cars, and men with soft hats and straw hats and white stove-pipes, and women apparently respectable who wore diamond ear-rings as they passed in and out of big-windowed shops. But for all these signs of what continent we were on, there was something foreign about the place. Though we were near midsummer, the air was thick and damp and chilly. Now and then a few drops came drizzling from what looked like a tremendous storm-cloud, yet brought forth no more than this mouse of a shower. There was a smell of coal-smoke; flakes of soot came settling down on our hands and our linen; even the half-finished public buildings were as grimy

as if they had stood there for a century. So as we looked at them through the murky atmosphere, and heard the talk of passers-by whose language we knew, though every face was strange, I found myself feeling as I have felt in some of those cities of the Old World that have none of its charm.

Presently we came to a shabby building where there was excitement. Bustling fellows with anxious faces were hurrying in and out, while from within came the sound of a Babel of voices. The place, I knew, was the Grain Exchange, where such business goes on as you may see wherever they deal in stocks.

“It’s different, though,” said Robbins, “when you stop to think. The question here is not who shall pay most for a bit of paper, generally about as valuable as an ivory chip. It is much more exciting than that; it is who shall hold half the breadstuff of the world. I don’t wonder that Socialism is growing popular.”

Just then the sidewalk was so crowded that we had to check our walk, and so overheard a

little of the talk about us. From this it transpired that Sloane & Williams had just bought half a million bushels of wheat, thereby turning the market upside down. And once or twice, as familiar sounds always catch the ear, I heard people name Rankell.

The name of Sloane & Williams sounded familiar, too; in an instant I saw why. Across the street it was gilded on a plate-glass window; and looking toward this, impelled I suppose by some unconscious memory of having noticed it before, I saw why Rankell's name was in the air. For there, just behind the window, stood the wizened little man listening attentively to a stout fellow with a long moustache, who held between his teeth a wooden toothpick. When I caught sight of Rankell his long-drawn upper lip gave him what I thought an expression of dismay; but as I watched him he raised the hand that held his gold-headed stick, and with the edge of his forefinger rubbed the lip until the irritation that had caused its closing was allayed. Then as he nodded a brisk

assent to what the fat broker was saying, I saw the old grin break over his face.

Rankell, the papers told us later, was suspected of improving the opportunity afforded by his trip West to take what was described as a "flyer" in wheat; and this purchase of half a million bushels was said to be the opening gun of his campaign. This meant, as Robbins said, that in the midst of political work he had stepped aside to play a pretty little game with famine.

It was during another walk that Robbins said this. Along with a bearded delegate in brown clothes we had strolled to quite a different part of the city, near the circus-like building of corrugated iron where the Convention was to sit. This was close to the lake, separated from the water by no more than a railroad where freight-trains puffed up and down. In front of us, as far as we could see, stretched the narrow park through which we walked. On one side, beyond sidewalks lined with half-grown trees, were elaborate houses which, in this region

where, within the memory of man, people lived in log huts, looked unused to being expensive. On the other side, just across the railroad, was the lake, its surface stirred by a light breeze that blew toward us; and here, when the passing trains permitted, we could look out over a great expanse of iridescent water, shining in the dim sunlight with a thousand dreamy hues of blue and green and purple.

“Yes,” repeated Robbins with rising warmth, “Rankell is playing with famine.”

“I don’t say he ain’t, sir,” said the cautious delegate.

“And there are his counters,” cried Robbins, turning about with an air of eloquence.

He pointed back toward the city. There, among the tall chimneys that were belching out black clouds of smoke to join the clouds that always overhung them, we could see the dark masses of grain-elevators looming up like misshapen mountains.

“Men like Rankell never work without pay,” went on Robbins with more heat than logic.

"Famine is what you vote for if you vote for Cox."

"I don't say it ain't," repeated the delegate, laying his hand on Robbins's arm. "Rankell's practical, but I don't like him. And I don't like Cox either,—not a bit better than you do. But how about the people? He's awful smart. How about the people?"

And there, Robbins said later, we had before us the two things honest men were bound to fight: one was money won and spent no one cared how, so long as there was little waste; the other was such temper as the delegate had shown.

"These men are not dishonest," said Robbins. "Nothing impresses me more than that; but they are so horribly afraid of seeming unpractical to a bugbear they call 'the people,' that you can frighten them by saying 'Boo!'"

IV.

BEFORE the Convention sat I had two other glimpses of Rankell: the first was one evening when, according to the papers, the working-men of the West made a grand spontaneous demonstration in favor of the Hon. William D. Cox. This was the culmination of much preliminary enthusiasm. For while Rankell and other men of practical reputation were hard at work with delegates and committees, political clubs in blue flannel suits and white stove-pipe hats had patrolled the streets with bands, and banners decorated with colossal portraits of Cox, who therein resembled a gray-haired fish. Of an evening, too, companies of rough fellows, supposed to be honest workingmen resting after the day's toil, would tramp noisily about, uttering rhythmical cries of "Cox! Cox!—Bil! lee! Cox!" These spontaneous expressions of public feeling impressed delegates more than Robbins liked.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that a man must

be something more than practical to recognize claque."

When the claque culminated in this demonstration, which took place before the hotel where Cox's committee, along with most others, had their headquarters, Robbins and I sat in a club window across the way. The street was crowded with just such rough fellows as we had often seen in smaller groups shouting the name of Cox. And as Mr. Cox's managers—at the head of whom was a military-looking personage called General Bob Tompkins—stood on the gallery above the portico, they were constantly greeted with the drum-like rhythmical shouts. Two or three times General Bob endeavored to quiet the disorder by making a speech. We could see him remove his broad-brimmed military hat, and hear him utter the words, "Fellow-citizens!" But shouts of "Cox!" overwhelmed his further eloquence. And each time, with a smile that we could see by the electric lights, he gave it up, and, turning to his friends, shook his bald head.

Among this company, I presently observed, Rankell did not appear.

“Of course he does n’t,” said Robbins, when I spoke of the fact; “this is a time for monopoly to keep dark. You may depend upon it, though, that he helps pay the bills.”

So we sat watching, until at last, when the crowded street seemed on the verge of riot, we heard the notes of an approaching band. Somehow the crowd parted, leaving such a narrow path as you see in old pictures of the passage of the Red Sea; and presently along came the band, playing a brave march quite in keeping with the drum-major in a huge white shako who stalked at the head. The shouting procession that followed with torches and banners and Roman candles had hardly begun to turn the next corner, when another band became audible from the direction whither the first had marched. In a minute more a second procession, coming from that side, began boldly to force its way into the narrow street that had seemed too crowded for the first. And then all

semblance of order disappeared ; and we sat looking down at a confused struggle of men with torches and men without, of bands half disbanded and bands still playing their loudest, of fireworks, and transparencies decorated with the fish-like countenance of Mr. Cox, and hats tossed in the air,—possibly not by their owners. And over all the noise came from time to time solid rhythmical shouts of “Cox! Cox!—Bil! lee! Cox!”

To me the demonstration looked alarmingly genuine. I said so to Robbins. Claque could not reach such dimensions.

Robbins laughed at me.

“It’s cleverly done,” he said, “but it’s humbug. If it was genuine there would have been a dozen fights by this time.” And thereupon he pointed out one or two details that had escaped my notice. We sat high enough to see above the heads of the people that the avenues whence the rival processions had entered the narrow street were by no means crowded. And in the counter procession which had capped the climax

of enthusiasm we soon descried the white shako of the drum-major who had headed the first.

“All they are really doing,” said Robbins, “is to fill one of the narrowest streets in town. These fellows are counter-marching like processions at the opera. What bothers me is that it must be frightfully expensive; and men like Rankell would n’t do it if it did n’t pay.”

Just as the tumult was at its highest I happened to look across the way. At a window of the hotel, a story or two above the portico where General Bob Tompkins, with his fierce military moustache and imperial, stood bowing and smiling in patriotic enthusiasm, I saw two figures. The room from which the window opened was dark, and the lace curtain had been pulled aside to give these two, who were hardly visible from the street, a clear sight of what was going on. From where we sat we could plainly see them by the electric lights. One was a red-faced fellow with a black moustache, who wore the blue flannel uniform and white hat of a political club. He looked busy, and

pointed here and there as he talked excitedly to his companion ; and the companion was Rankell, grinning in his more venerable manner as he nodded his wizened little head to show that he understood what was going on.

Presently Rankell pointed toward a part of the crowd that was becoming quiescent. Thereupon the red-faced man leaned forward and made some signal. Forthwith from that region arose louder than ever the rhythmical shout of "Cox ! Cox ! — Bil ! lee ! Cox !"

Then Rankell, with expanding smile, threw back his little shoulders and said something to his companion, who interrupted the biting of a fresh cigar to make a jolly answer, laying his hand on Rankell's shoulder ; and together they slipped behind the flapping lace curtain.

The red-faced man, Robbins told me, was one Mike Macmanus, boss of the county.

"He's stage-manager, you see," said Robbins. "Rankell can't show to-night ; but he's making sure that Mike gives them their money's worth."

V.

MY other glimpse of Rankell was the day before the Convention sat. By that time Robbins was so deep in political work that he had little time for me, and seemed rather absent when we came together. He needed all his steam, he apologetically said, to keep him going; there was none left to blow off.

The work that kept him busy was much like what Rankell was about. In the great hotel whence General Bob Tompkins and his friends had watched the demonstration in honor of Cox every available room had been taken by committees and delegations. Above the doors that lined the hot velvet-carpeted corridors, where chandeliers were lighted and the air was thick with tobacco-smoke, were printed placards telling the ceaseless crowds that elbowed their way about who was within. "National Committee" stared at you above one door, the names of States above others, and so on. With-

in these rooms committees and delegations sometimes sat closeted ; again in formal session they would receive deputations of speakers come to urge the claims of this or that candidate. It had grown plain that Cox was the most prominent. Rankell and other practical men were making so serious an impression that opposition, to be effective, must be more than negative. Accordingly Robbins and men come like him to check what they called the national disgrace involved in Cox's nomination had been forced to choose whom they should support against him. Their choice fell on a certain Senator Campbell, whose career, though partisan, had been thoroughly honest.

There were two or three objections to him, though. He was not magnetic ; he had a cast in the eye that would lend itself to caricature ; and on one occasion, in the warmth of a speech excited by some trumped-up terrorism in the South, he had so far forgotten himself as to proclaim that a black skin could give a man no higher rights than a white. This dictum —

admitted by Senator Hotchkiss, his chief manager, to be "the sole stain on an otherwise spotless and philanthropic public career" — had alienated, practical men declared, a great part of the negro vote. Robbins and his friends were hard at work trying to convince delegates, who, as he said, "would like to be honest if they dared," that these objections were not so insuperable in the eyes of a free and independent people as what might be urged against a statesman like Cox, who, for all his practical friends, had made a fortune in offices where his salary would hardly pay his board.

At this moment the chief object of their efforts was the delegation from Alabama. Alphabetically, Robbins pointed out to me, Alabama was the most valuable State in the Union. She led the roll-call; if she voted solidly for a candidate the impression would be hard to unmake. Besides, half the delegates from Alabama were negroes or mulattoes; if they could be brought to vote for Campbell, the effects of that unlucky speech on terrorism

would be nullified. Yet Cox's men were vigorously attacking Alabama too, and the work became so important that Campbell's managers pressed into service whoever could help them. At one time Robbins was seized with an idea that even I might do some good, and so led me into the committee-room where, with Campbell's other leading supporters, Senator Hotchkiss sat in state.

The Senator, a thin, sallow man, with a drooping gray moustache and appalling solemnity of manner, received me with sorrowful courtesy. Much as a physician might question a patient whose symptoms were alarming, he proceeded to ask my opinions. What was the state of feeling in the business community? How far had the speech about terrorism influenced what he might describe as the Abolition vote? Of these matters, on which I understood Rankell and his friends dwelt at much length, I knew little. My answers, then, were so far from satisfactory, that in spite of the enthusiasm which by this time had made me, as Robbins said,

“positively explosive,” the Senator soon dismissed me with a disconcertingly solemn bow, and turned his attention to a more practical gentleman with gray hair.

The last I saw of the committee-room, this Governor, whose name I failed to catch, was taking a handful of cigars from a box that lay open on the table, meanwhile assuring an anxious friend that though the expenses of the canvass were enormous, we might rest assured that Mr. Campbell’s managers would husband every resource.

Robbins had not rested here. He privately presented me in the corridor to General Crowley, the chairman of the delegation from Alabama, and to Mr. Montgomery, a leading member thereof. Crowley was a large man, in an ill-fitting frock-coat; he wore a gray moustache and chin-beard; his stiff gray hair was brushed straight behind his ears; his thick aquiline nose was surmounted by steel-rimmed spectacles; and he carried his left hand in a red silk sling. Montgomery was a spruce negro whose coun-

tenance in repose had the air described as Napoleonic, but whose manner when he spoke revealed in its vivacity that before the war he had been a body-servant. These gentlemen received me with formal courtesy, asking whether I should like to stump the State in the autumn. But finding me unavailable for this purpose, and discovering, I suppose, no practical traits, they proceeded the next day to forget my name. So Robbins gave me up as a bad job.

“You see,” he said as he whisked off to his committee-room the morning before the Convention, “what you might have done if you had not wasted your youth.”

Thus left alone, and pretty thoroughly wrought up, I found myself that morning aimlessly pushing about the hotel which for the moment was the centre of American political life ; and in my wanderings I had my last glimpse of Rankell before the Convention.

In the crowd that was passing up one side of the great staircase from the office, while policemen forced a companion stream to pass

down the other, some one called my name; and there to my surprise I found Tom Henderson, whose heavy cheeks, unshaven for a day, were covered with a grayish stubble.

He was on his way home from Montana, he said, where he had been shooting. He had been fool enough to stop for a look at things in this confounded hole.

And taking my arm he proceeded, as we slowly passed upstairs, to relate with much indignation how he had been knocked up in the middle of the night. His visitor turned out to be a certain Mr. Grand, of Sharon Springs, Nebraska, who, much the worse for drink, stated that he was come to share his bed.

“I told the beggar to clear out,” said Tom, “and he would n’t. He got pathetic, — said that such treatment at his time of life made him feel hurt, — fifty-three years old, by —, and always voted the regular ticket. And do you know the fellow began pulling off his trousers. Well, I rang for the clerk; and, by Jove! sir, I

was told that if I didn't like it I might move out; there were plenty of people waiting for half a bed. I did move out. Sat up all night. I'm off by the next train."

"By the way," he went on, mollified by my sympathetic listening, "a queer thing happened last night. Have you been to the Occidental Theatre?"

"No," I said.

"Shady kind of place. They're doing a leg-piece, — Hiawatha. Well, the first girl I saw in the chorus was that blonde who used to sing at parties, — little Lottimer, don't you know. She winked at me; I was in the front row. I cleared out. She's gone off like the devil — thin as a rail, false teeth, and whole kegs of paint. It's too bad she's got so low; she used to be a nice little thing. Damn it, I've half an idea I started her myself."

And Tom, who had done his best to repair the ravages of a sleepless night with brandy and soda, looked the image of virtuous repentance.

Just then a door opened in the over-heated corridor we had reached. There was a rush of reporters and other curious people to know what was at hand. So Tom and I were crowded aside as a path was opened for a company that emerged from the room in double file.

“Where are they going?” asked a man reaching over my shoulder to pull the sleeve of one who was clearing a way for the procession.

“Alabama,” was the answer.

“Who are they, any way?” asked Tom of the questioner.

“Cox men,” he answered with a look of contemptuous surprise.

“Barrels!” sung out a voice behind us. But only feeble laughter greeted this sally, for every one of these Cox men, it appeared, was somebody. And at the head of the procession, along with General Bob Tompkins, whose military hat was well on one side, trotted Rankell, doing his best to keep up with his companion’s strides.

As I looked at the little man I felt my anger

rising. Excited by the unwonted bustle of the past few days, I remembered in one flash all that I had known of him to this time. And here he was now, placidly trotting away to persuade the puzzled men from Alabama that the wise course was to make a nomination they knew disgraceful. If they made it he would be the gainer; and that was all he cared for. Thinking thus, with the heat I had caught from Robbins, I stared rudely at Rankell's face; and he in passing caught my eye. He thought, I suppose, I was some one he knew. At any rate he nodded his head, with a dry "How d-e do, sir?"

"Who is that?" asked Tom in my ear.

What Tom had told of Sadie, and all the story of her family, were fresh in my mind.

"The man that started little Lottimer," I burst out.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Tom, who failed to grasp my metaphor. "Who'd have thought it? And how should you know?"

But when I did not answer he tactfully

refrained from pressing the question, with a sigh of relief, and the words, "Well, I'm mighty glad to hear it was n't me."

VI.

WHEN I found next day the seat which Robbins had secured me on the platform, there were still few people in the hall where the Convention was coming together. As I looked about at the wilderness of rough pine carpentry where delegates and substitutes and reporters and guests and public were slowly straggling in, the place seemed like a circus-tent too large for the town where it is pitched. On all sides the hall was draped with flags and bright bunting. At regular intervals on the front of the galleries appeared pasteboard shields gaudily painted with what by courtesy are styled the arms of the several States of the Federal Union. In the midst of all, and largest of all, blazed the stars and stripes surmounted by a stuffed bald eagle. And the circus-like impression was enhanced

by a brass band, which from just above this national emblem was blowing into the cubic acre of walled space the thin notes of popular melodies that we have chosen to describe as national airs.

Robbins's parting speech had perhaps suggested the idea. "This Convention is to begin," he said, "with a regular circus. And the opening act will be a fight for who shall be ring-master and who clown."

This, being interpreted, signified that the adherents of Cox and of Campbell proposed testing their respective strength by nominating rival candidates for the chair. Cox's men, it was understood, brought forward General Bob Tompkins; Campbell's, Senator Hotchkiss. The Senator, to be sure, was so far from a model representative of reform that he had lately been actively concerned in a vote of public money, that people not benefited thereby described as "a steal."

"But then," Robbins said, "he hates Cox like the devil. And he understands politics.

And this is a fight where we have everything to gain and nothing to lose.”

In fact, if Hotchkiss were defeated, it would be no more than everybody expected. Cox's name was shouting in every street; Campbell's was kept very quiet. What work had been done for him was so far beneath the surface that general report declared Cox able to carry the Convention without a struggle. With Robbins's help, though, I had seen enough to know that the stout delegate with whom we walked beside the lake was fairly typical of all. These delegates generally liked Cox as little as we; they honestly thought his candidacy disgraceful. But the shouting demonstrations of his workers, along with the practical speeches of Rankell and the like, had frightened them. How far they dared act on their convictions was the question. Under these circumstances, if Hotchkiss had even a respectable following the blow to Cox would be serious.

Thus primed I watched the gathering crowd. Reporters began to fill their seats, sharpening

pencils and chatting with such unconcern as you see in an orchestra ready tuned for the overture. Distinguished guests moved about the platform, shaking hands and finding their places. Substitutes crowded their seats behind the delegates as thick as boys in the gallery of a theatre. Delegates appeared in such numbers that their yellow, cane-bottomed chairs were no longer visible. And the public, flocking to the pine benches that on all sides rose until they met the lattice-like braces which curled up to the roof, merged in tier on tier of faces that showed like so many dull white spots against the vast background of black coats. Among them my eye picked out a pretty girl with red feathers in her hat, who wore a Campbell badge; and I looked at her with interest until she caught my eye and flushed.

So I turned again to the delegates, among whom I presently picked out such as I knew by sight. There was Robbins, brimming over with spirits, whispering right and left things that made his neighbors laugh. There, a little way

off, was Hotchkiss, solemnly lecturing a Jewish delegate with black whiskers. There was General Bob Tompkins, looking straight forward, with the air of one sitting for a photograph. Near by, Mike Macmanus shifted uneasily in his seat, crossing his legs first one way and then the other. Farther off, I caught sight of stately General Crowley, the Alabama chairman, with his steel spectacles, and his red sling, and his iron-gray hair brushed behind his ears; and close beside him, of the Napoleonic negro Montgomery. Finally, in the front row of the largest delegation I spied Rankell, benignly blinking as if he were in church.

The band struck up the "Star-Spangled Banner," with startling effects on the cymbals. Everybody sat expectant. A big Irish policeman who was keeping strangers off the floor thrust his round face about the corner of the platform, and I could see his jaws moving as he munched a quid. Then, as the last notes of the national air died out, a lank, smooth-shaven divine—who somebody said was the

Bishop of Minnesota — arose, stepped to the front of the platform, lifted up his arms, and at the highest pitch consistent with clerical dignity uttered the words, "Let us pray."

I saw Rankell's yellow head bob devoutly down. Many delegates followed his example; others looked undecided how to act under seemingly unfamiliar circumstances. The public and the distinguished guests preserved respectful silence; but the reporters kept whispering among themselves, and the stenographers kept their pencils going in pace with the very reverend speaker, and across the hall I could see the gleam of moving instruments as the band repaired the ravages of their recent performance. Meanwhile the Bishop, with closed eyes, was busily intoning a prayer intelligible only to stenographers. And so the Convention was opened.

Governor Duddy, of Kansas, was unanimously elected temporary chairman, and, coming to his desk, began a patriotic harangue. In five minutes, having shouted away what

voice he had, he was merely a stout figure in a loose frock-coat, vibrating a brown beard that hung down to his waist, shaking his head to keep a troublesome forelock out of his eyes, and bending his knees with a sudden jerk when occasionally he emphasized his eloquence by a downward gesture.

So the formal proceedings went on, until at last balloting for a permanent chairman was declared in order, and somebody arose among the delegates naming General Robert F. Tompkins, of Missouri. At the sound of this name there was a burst of applause, and the listening delegates whispered among themselves.

Now, I thought, the struggle was coming. Somebody would nominate Hotchkiss; there would be fresh applause, whose volume would have grave significance; and the vote that followed would tell what hopes Campbell's men might cherish. Full of excitement, then, I waited for the applause to end, wondering who among these delegates before me had been chosen to nominate General Bob Tompkins's rival.

The applause subsided at last. There was a brief pause; and then, to everybody's amazement, Hotchkiss himself arose. There was a stir throughout the hall. Everybody had supposed he was the rival candidate, but surely he could not propose his own name. In an instant more the whole assembly was so still that you could hear the scratching of the reporters' pencils, and every eye was fixed on Hotchkiss, whose thin figure stood out with strange distinctness against the blurred background of black coats and white faces.

He made no speech, but standing silent until he was sure that everybody was ready to hear what he said, he nominated — with a ponderous gravity that made me feel how on his words, despite his slippery character, hung perhaps the future of the nation — the Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery, of Alabama.

For an instant there was profound silence. Then arose such an uproar as I had never heard in my life. Half the hall was on its legs, shouting, waving hats, wildly gesticulating.

There were thunders of incoherent cheers met by answering storms of groans and hisses. I caught a glimpse of Robbins, his head thrown back, shaking with laughter. I saw Macmanus, his fat face livid with rage, start to jump on his chair, and pulled back by his friends. Away to the left I saw General Crowley, half a head taller than the men about him, peering excitedly through his steel-rimmed spectacles. And in the midst of all I spied Rankell, his eyes half closed, with a quizzically puzzled expression, as he deliberately scratched one of his temples. Meanwhile stout Governor Duddy inaudibly hammered his desk, and shook his forelock with leonine rage. And to the right, where I turned for a peep at the pretty girl, I saw that she had quite forgotten my impertinence, as she leaned forward with a breathless interest that parted a pair of lips as red as her feathers.

Hotchkiss, who understood politics, had made his point. When I had time to think, I saw what it was. The weakest spot in Campbell's record was that unlucky speech on terrorism,

which Cox's men had declared would alienate the negro vote. And here Campbell's own managers proposed for the highest office within their control as black a negro as walked America. And Cox's men, taken unawares, had tried to howl down his name.

"And that's not all," Robbins cried, later. "Tompkins used to be a slave-holder. By Jove! sir, it begins to look like Campbell."

And so it did. Tompkins tried to parry the blow by rising to withdraw his name and second the nomination of Montgomery; but the moment the words were out of his mouth somebody started a laugh that went like wild-fire about the hall, and all General Bob's dignity could not preserve him from looking sheepish.

So the Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery, of Alabama, was made permanent chairman of the Convention; and thereby the supporters of the Hon. William D. Cox were very practically discomfited.

VII.

FOR two or three days, so far as I could see, the defeated faction did not rally. Proceedings went on much as they had begun. The Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery — derisively termed “Pomp” by members of the opposing party — had a clerk well primed with parliamentary law, so he succeeded in deciding points of order very creditably. In the intervals of filibustering, then, speakers from every part of the Union delivered more or less audible speeches limited by general consent to half an hour.

Meanwhile a platform had been constructed, vigorously denouncing the opposite party in long words derived from the Latin, and promising in general terms pretty much everything for which there was reason to suppose a popular demand. Even Prohibition had a good word; and the language in which Mormonism, outrages against negroes, and Chinese immigration were denounced, must have sent thrills of

admiration pulsing through the happy fields where the spirits of the dead Abolitionists rest from their labors. The tariff was declared to be a corner-stone of liberty, but one that should never be suffered so to develop as to check the legitimate progress of American industry. Silver was pronounced a precious metal, and those unfriendly to it as malignantly unpatriotic as demagogues who maintain the violability of contracts. The Civil Service was asserted to be the best on earth, but all honest efforts to reform it should be heartily welcomed. And so on. For the rest, the platform was carefully made so long that nobody need be expected to read it. It was unanimously adopted, printed in all the newspapers, and so consigned to oblivion.

Nothing but the nominating speeches commanded much attention. These were listened to, and the band played separate airs to greet the names of the different candidates. Cox was greeted with "Rally Round the Flag;" Campbell with the less stirring "Hail Columbia;" lesser men with lesser strains. And each came

to be known by his tune, as Wagner's heroes are known by one or another flourish of trumpets or hautboys.

All this time, as I have said, the result of Senator Hotchkiss's master-stroke seemed unimpaired. Cox's managers were apparently at a loss; their popular demonstrations lessened; and delegates began freely to say that it would be a burning shame to nominate a man who was not honest. "Honest old Jim Campbell," indeed,—the words with which the speaker who nominated that statesman closed his impassioned address,—became the phrase of the moment.

As far as I could see, then, the tide had turned strongly enough to convince the most pessimistic that this Convention was not to be frightened by popular clamor into doing irreparable mischief. The delegates all said so, with an air of conviction. But as time went on Robbins, who at first was jubilant, grew anxious.

"I don't like the way Cox's men behave," he said. "They keep too quiet."

And now and then he heard disturbing bits

of news. An endless telegraphic correspondence in cipher was going on with Cox himself. The banks, it was rumored, had cashed some enormous checks for Rankell. A special train was said to be on its way from the East with thousands of copies of an illustrated paper that Rankell owned. Finally, one night came a still more serious matter.

Robbins turned up, thoroughly excited. He was tempted, he declared, never to meddle with politics again. What disturbed him did not at first transpire. At last, however, he told me how Rankell had openly tried to capture Montgomery.

“He asked him to dinner,” said Robbins, “with all Cox’s managers; and we only found it out just as the fellow was starting. He didn’t go, but we had a hateful job to hold him. I wouldn’t stay to hear the bargain. Between ourselves, though, I am afraid Montgomery made Hotchkiss commit himself about the Haytian mission. You can’t fight money with patriotic arguments.”

But at worst the Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery had proved incorruptible by Rankell. And whatever happened, said Robbins, as he began to recover equanimity, we could count on Alabama, which was a good deal.

On the afternoon when at last the Convention came to a ballot, Cox's men made their first open stroke. On every seat in the hall was placed a copy of the paper which, as rumor had rightly prophesied, a special train had brought from the East. The chief cartoon, printed in colors, bore on the situation. Senator Hotchkiss, hardly recognizable for a bland smile, offered an arm-chair to a deserving-looking negro intended to represent the Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery, of Alabama. And the Senator had so placed his respectfully bowing person as to conceal from the Hon. Cneius's view the neighboring figure of Campbell, who with folded arms and ferocious smile contemplated, just at the focus of his crossed eyes, a company of piratical whites blazing away at a family of prolific negroes who wallowed in a sea of vermilion blood.

I noticed Rankell passing this paper about, and blandly calling attention to its apt wit. He was suspected, Robbins informed me, of having conceived the idea of the cartoon.

In spite of all this, when at last the Convention came to an informal ballot, and the clerk, standing on a platform beneath the pulpit-like desk where the Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery sat, began to call the roll of States, Alabama cast all her twenty votes for Campbell. And the moral effect of this was such that, though scattering votes prevented anybody from receiving a majority, Campbell turned out in the end to have fifteen or twenty more supporters than Cox.

With this encouraging result, the Convention adjourned until evening.

VIII.

Now at last Robbins began to breathe freely.

“We have got them, I think,” he said as we sat down to a quiet dinner. “We have

had to do hateful things; but the only choice was a choice of evils. The money has been against us, and money carries the mob. But the right is on our side; and I hope I shall always be a good enough American to believe blindly that the right is bound to prevail. Let us eat and drink, for to-night, sir, they die."

As we ate and drank our talk fell on Rankell, who more than any other figure seemed to me typical of the evil we had feared was working about us. Wherever the worst mischief appeared there you found his traces. Most of those who were here to grab what they could were at least about the business they lived by. But Rankell had stepped aside from what other harms his fortune was working, to play here for his own gain any game that would bring money to him, even though it brought dishonor to the country; and he played it by stirring up what was worst in these men about him, — their silliness and their greed.

I was waxing warm, when a servant brought

Robbins a note. As he glanced at it his face changed. He sprang up with an exclamation.

“Macmanus is sick again,” he explained, “and they can’t find Montgomery. I hope to Heaven Rankell has n’t got hold of him.”

With that he was off; and until the Convention was over I saw nothing more of him.

It was only later that I learned the significance of his parting words. On previous occasions of political danger, it appeared, Macmanus had been known mysteriously to fall ill. His official place was thereupon taken by a substitute; but his spirit, like that of Julius Cæsar, would prove mightier than his bodily presence. For as sure as Mike disappeared, out came the boys from far and near, conducting themselves in a manner that argued able generalship.

As for Montgomery, things turned out as Robbins feared. Rankell had got hold of him. For an hour or two he was closeted with Cox’s

managers, from whose company he emerged, as my informant put it, full of champagne, and devilish mum.

IX.

THAT evening the streets about the hall were so crowded that you could scarcely move ; and the crowd — so far as you could discern it by the flickering glare of gas-lamps and electric lights — looked wicked. Rough fellows surged all about the corrugated iron walls of the building, pushing, shouting, jesting, quarrelling, quite beyond the control of what few policemen appeared to assert the dignity of the law.

Within the building, though I came there early, the seats of the public were already full of a company unlike what I had seen there before. In the seat that until now had been occupied by the pretty girl with red feathers sat a rough young fellow with a week's beard and a collarless flannel shirt. His ragged hat was pulled over his eyes, and in company with others of his kind he was preparing himself for

what might come by occasional pulls from a brown glass bottle shared between them. Once or twice they fell to horse-play. At last the untidy youth was somehow dislodged from his seat, to arise from the floor with a flood of indignant eloquence that augured ill for the future of those about him.

From time to time came from without the muffled sound of such rhythmical shouts as I had heard when I watched the trumped-up demonstration in honor of Cox. Nothing but the rhythm penetrated to my seat; yet I seemed to hear the Babel joining in articulate cries of "Cox! Cox! — Bil! lee! Cox!"

The platform, all this time, was half empty. Like myself, I suppose, the distinguished guests had found difficulty in penetrating the crowd, and many had given up in despair. But the reporters were all in their places, and delegates were rapidly coming in, — some with torn coats, — and the band was playing operatic selections, almost drowned in the noisy talk of the assembled public.

The delegates talked excitedly among themselves, most of them standing, or pacing such part of the aisles as they could pass; and after a little while I found myself, still full of my talk with Robbins, watching Rankell, who stood erect in his place. His face wore its most active look; every fibre of his small body—even to the wisps of yellow hair that roughly fringed his head—seemed instinct with life. He talked right and left, shaking hands, and constantly, with a motion that seemed habitual in his rare moments of excitement, throwing back his shoulders and bending his head towards his breast until his bristling yellow beard curled forward to meet his descending nose. And as I looked at him, knowing of him all I knew, and as I watched the smiling pride with which those about him listened to the famous little creature's words, I began to think of him as of a venomous spider stretching his golden web far and wide across this whole continent of America, and grinning as he sees his victims quiver in the meshes.

The Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery took his seat at last. As he rapped the Convention to order he looked more Napoleonic than ever, possibly by way of precaution against the rising vivacity of his champagne. And, to my surprise, the rough company that had invaded the building—through holes, it afterwards appeared, cut in the wall by the lake-side—became as quiet as lambs. You could plainly hear the motion that the Convention now proceed to a ballot, and indeed all the formal words that preceded the call of the States.

The clerk stepped forward, then, amid perfect silence, and, tally in hand, called out in a shrill monotone the name of Alabama.

On the informal ballot, as everybody remembered, Alabama had cast all her twenty votes for Campbell. Naturally she was expected to do so now. General Crowley arose with a paper in his hand.

“Alabama,” he shouted, bending forward with a jerk in his effort to be audible, “gives nineteen votes to Campbell—”

Then came a pause, as the General gathered his breath.

“And one,” he went on pantingly, “to William D. Cox.”

With that began a riot that made such riots as had come before seem nothing. At first it was simply a yell from what you would have thought every throat in the building; at any rate there were so many that the noise was incessant for minutes, swelling now and then, but never ceasing its shrill inarticulate utterance. The whole building was on its feet. Flags, appearing no one knew whence, waved wildly on every side. I saw the dirty fellow who had stolen the pretty girl's place unsteadily standing on his seat, his mouth wide open for his roar. And all about him, as far as I could see, were acting likewise.

Presently the noise began to take articulate form. The rhythmic sound that I had heard from without faintly arose somewhere in the distance. It was caught up by more voices and more; and finally, along with the shrill unceas-

ing yell you began to hear, in bass monotone, solid cries of "Cox! Cox! — Bil! lee! Cox!"

Minutes passed, and tens of minutes, with no change. Delegates sprang up in their places and peered about with looks of startled wonder. I caught sight of Hotchkiss, frowning his sternest and sawing the air with his arm as he talked vigorously to those about him; of Robbins, no smile left, clutching at the coat of a delegate who was turning from him; of General Bob Tompkins standing in his chair and waving his flag with the best of them. I could see the men from Alabama, too, clustering about big General Crowley; and Crowley seemed shouting at them as he waved above his head the paper from which he had read the vote. Finally, in the midst of all I saw Rankell, glasses on nose, coolly writing in a note-book. From this he presently tore a leaf which he gave, along with a coin and a pat on the back, to a messenger who was standing by. And as the messenger made off, Rankell folded his arms and bent his head again until his beard curled forward.

By and by the shrill yell that had persisted throughout the clamor began to subside. Human throats, I thought, could keep it up no longer. In the brief intervals between the rhythmic cries, within and without, of "Cox! Cox!—Bil! lee! Cox!" there came something near enough silence to let us know that the band had begun playing. At last the storm subsided enough to make audible the notes of what they played.

It was Cox's battle-hymn, "Rally Round the Flag." In an instant thousands of voices took it up. Then, mingling with the chorus, rose again the rhythmical shouts of "Cox!" Finally, above all and louder than ever, swelled the shrill inarticulate cry that had come first. And flags waved.

Just then I saw somebody pass to Montgomery a twisted bit of paper. And Montgomery stopped his antic pounding on the desk to glance at what was in it; then, as he resumed his pantomime, he looked anxiously towards the delegates. Following his eye, I saw it fixed on

Rankell, who leaned his little head far out into the aisle, a grin of excitement on his wrinkled face as he nodded so briskly that the glasses fell from his nose.

A minute later Montgomery was sitting at his desk, scribbling in turn for dear life. Then he called a messenger, and giving him what he had written, pointed with his thumb towards the spot where I could see the back of General Crowley's long hair.

And when finally the noise abated it was because the General had faced about and forced his way to the foot of the platform where the clerk stood motionless with his tally. Here Crowley waved a paper above his head, calling for a hearing; and by and by he had it. But his voice was gone; only the clerk could hear what he said. So the whole assembly waited breathless for the impassive monotone in which the clerk announced the news.

"Alabama," he sung out, "changes her vote. She gives twenty votes to William D. Cox."

And thereupon for another half hour came the shouts for Cox.

They carried the day. When the roll-call was ended Cox had six hundred votes out of eight. And as Hotchkiss rose to move that the nomination be made unanimous, the shouts that greeted him almost drowned the cannon that in the park by the lake-side close at hand were thundering out the news that the chief work of the Convention was done.

X.

AND this was the last I ever saw of Rankell. Just what part he played in this monstrous drama no mere looker-on can tell. What I saw I have written down, leaving unsaid what I and others guessed. All I need tell besides is that when the Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery went back to Alabama, the papers told us that he purchased a beautiful residence in Mobile.

V.

THE END OF RANKELL.

I.

AS the autumn that followed the Convention wore on, the papers were full of news. The opposite party had nominated a candidate as honest as Campbell. So the campaign that was fighting for the suffrages of the people, with speeches and torches and money spent no one knew how, was after all much what the struggle had been in the Convention. And somehow, in spite of Cox and his backers, who talked loudly in general phrase of everything but honesty, and waved flags amid torrents of military metaphor while bands played their battle-hymn, the issue slowly grew plainer. But Cox was a good fellow and a smart man ; and the party behind him was so beautifully organized that a nomination might practically be considered as good as an election. Moral members of his party, too, having discovered

that his opponent had as a youth been arrested in a state of intoxication, undertook, with some success, to make a moral issue of their own. But men who cared for the honor of the country rallied strongly, speaking and printing the naked truth about Cox's career. And day by day it was clearer that they were answered by no more cogent arguments than bands and battle-flags. So people who could be roused to think for themselves took to thinking, which was the last thing Mr. Cox's party wanted.

The papers, then, were full of political news, finely colored to suit the taste of readers; and you had to turn to the inner pages for anything else.

By and by, however, another matter crowded to the first columns of the papers, and drove much patriotic eloquence to the inner pages, where it looked out of place among European telegrams, and criminal matters, and the like. There was a panic in wheat, — not a little flurry such as I had seen as I walked with Robbins past the Exchange, but a great trouble

that concerned half the world. The people wanted breadstuff. The supply fell short. It was locked up in such great elevators as we had seen looming through the smoke-clouds as we walked beside the lake. Who held it no one rightly knew,—along with other names there were whispers of Rankell's,—but held it was until hunger should make men ready to pay what the holders chose to ask. What that might be nobody could tell; the clickers ticked out rising bids and no sales. And I, when I read this news, thought often of the decent little figure in black clothes and top-boots that I had seen in Sloane's big window listening to the words that pushed themselves past the broker's vibrating toothpick, and calmly rubbing the long, shaven upper lip.

One afternoon came a fresh piece of news that for the moment, in our part of the world, crowded out even the panic. It was a cold, drizzling day, when the flagged sidewalks were slippery with mud that passing throngs had carried thither from the roadway.

As I passed along I heard newsboys crying an "Extra." Catching the sound of Rankell's name, I called a shivering little freckled bare-foot, and bought one of his papers to see what the news might be. Then, with my damp umbrella resting on one shoulder, I stood with my back to a shop-window; and while endless streams of people and of wagons hurried past me I read what had happened.

Rankell was dead. That very morning the colorless little creature whose touch turned all things to gold, but on whose head no Midas ears ever sprouted, had tramped briskly as ever down to his great store. He had peered about as was his custom, letting no corner escape his sharp eyes. He had scolded some poor girl who came late to her work. Then, as usual, he had passed into his white-walled office and shut the ground-glass door behind him. That was the last mortal eyes saw of him in life.

When hours had passed and he gave no sign, a clerk had gathered courage to knock at his door; and after a while, having no answer,

he had timidly opened it and looked in. There, close to the open desk strewn with papers, lay Rankell. His stiff hand still held the paper tape that clicked from the ticker, and in his fall he had overturned the tall basket that stood ready to receive it. So he lay half buried under the snake-like rolls that told what men would pay for his wheat, while the little machine kept ever vomiting down more and more, with such sympathy as the birds showed the dead children in the wood.

II.

HE had a grand funeral from old St. Peter's, where on the intervening Sunday an eloquent doctor of divinity had said many things about the vanity of riches and the importance of attendance at divine service. In forty years, except when kept away from town, Rankell had never missed a Sunday; the congregation looked with sentiment at the empty pew over whose mahogany rail they should

no more spy the bald little yellow head. All the papers, too, had printed long obituary notices, dwelling on Rankell's honorable mercantile career; from the day when he bought his first recorded bill of goods he had never once hesitated to meet his obligations. Who, wrote the editors, can hope for a nobler epitaph? So said the public, talking in streets, and shops, and horse-cars, and hotels of his great enterprise and his great success.

But I, for my part, thought far otherwise. What I knew of Rankell was only what had come to the knowledge of an indolent fellow who had happened once or twice to catch a glimpse of what he was doing. Those whose lives had been near his must know far more than I. Yet I myself knew what I have written. I remembered the gracious home of the Wybornes, and thought of the staring new Rankellville that had grown about the blackened cellar, full of weeds, which marked the spot where their house had stood. I thought of Howard in his grave, of Anna as she used to

hurry alone through the darkening streets. I thought of the Lottimers, too, simply living their thoughtless lives until Rankell played the trick that brought them ruin,—of how the father, with a broken heart, kissed for the last time the faces that had no looks of love for him; of the mother dead in the home that charity offered the homeless; of Sadie dancing lewdly before whoever paid to see her shame; of Joe, God knew where. I thought of the country on the path to dishonor if the work of the man who lay dead should not be undone; and of poor children moaning for the bread that was locked in his storehouses. With all this there was only one picture of a gentler kind, and even that was comical; for I could not check a smile as I thought of the little creature standing in the churchyard years ago and blowing his nose with a big red handkerchief as he called a fine day that dreary morning when they buried Mary Lee.

This was no time for mourning, but rather one for rejoicing, when at last he could meddle

in the world no more. Yet when the day for burying Rankell came, I found myself impelled by a curiosity for which I had small respect to go and watch this last scene in the drama of his life.

III.

THE old church and the churchyard were guarded by policemen, who allowed no one to pass in without a black-edged card of admission to the ceremony. But people like me, unworthy of this honor, might if we pleased stand without the iron fence and watch what was doing. So there I stood that sunny autumn morning, as a light wind blew through the thinning branches of the trees and crisp leaves came fluttering down to the tangled grass between the gravestones.

The company about me was such as in any great city gathers at hours when honest working people are busy at work. There were women of the poorer sort, with dirty shawls

flung over their heads, and sometimes with large baskets that bothered the people near them ; there were bold-faced, shrill-voiced girls in cheap finery ; there were barefoot children in rags, and boys who played truant for the show ; there were men, too, mostly of the rougher kind, with brutal faces and dull eyes, jesting with one another and with such women of their class as were at hand ; and there were odd figures emerged no one knew whence. Near me I saw a blear-eyed old fellow, whose pink face seamed with wrinkles was half buried beneath his curly snuff-brown wig and the dyed whiskers that showed a rim of white between his cheeks and the blue-black hair. He wore cotton gloves, and as he blinked at the spectacle about him he rested one hand on a gilt-headed black cane. Close behind him stood a dull-looking giant of a man, in a rough flannel shirt open enough at the neck to reveal the swelling muscles of his sunburnt chest. His ragged hat was pushed back. There was an ugly scar on his bald forehead. Above his dull

blue eyes his brow was knitted in a frown that would have made his face wicked but that his heavy jaw hung feebly open and showed a tongue too big for his coarse mouth. As he stood staring over the shoulder of the blear-eyed little man in a wig, he looked half an idiot. Some sailor I thought he must be, not yet free from the fumes of a debauch.

Such a company jostled one another and thrust their faces close to the iron paling of the churchyard as we stood waiting for the last rites. Within the churchyard were sexton's men with cords and shovels, pottering about the little pile of earth and the great slate-stone slab that had been taken from the mouth of the tomb where Rankell was to rest. And from the gray church just at hand came now and then the faint sound of organ music and of voices chanting funeral hymns.

' By and by there was a bustle about the doors of the church, and you could hear the thud of bolts as the sextons drew them back. Then through the opened doors the organ began to peal

out the "Dead March in Saul." And forth between the Roman columns of the portico came into the autumn sunshine a stately procession, which turned slowly to the left and passed down the side-steps into the churchyard. The crowd pressed closer than ever to the paling; they pushed me to the very side of the bleary-eyed little man and the sunburnt giant, who, as his stupid frown grew deeper, looked more drunken still.

So the procession passed into the churchyard. First came the clergy in their surplices, and with them choir-boys, followed by the tall fellows who sang bass. Then came twelve of the most eminent men in America, in black coats, with broad white sashes over their shoulders. These were the pall-bearers. Among them I saw the fish-like pallid face of Cox, with worried eyes and silky white hair. Like the rest, he carried his beaver hat in his hand; and his face, like the others, — which we all had seen in picture-papers and the windows of photograph shops, — wore an expression of solem-

nity. After the pall-bearers came eight clumsy porters carrying Rankell's coffin. This was covered with a purple velvet pall embroidered with a large silver cross. Then, amid the rolling peals of the funeral march, came vestrymen; then a long line of mourners, of lesser and lesser commercial and public note. And we little folk, who had not been deemed worthy of the black-edged cards of summons, stood without, watching the elect pass into the churchyard. Somehow I found myself dreaming of what this place was like in the olden time, when St. Peter's still looked across green country fields to the blue rivers still unpoluted with the trade of nations and the unspeakable things that a great city casts into waters that flow about it.

Then the clergymen read and the choir sang the last lines of the funeral service, as the sexton's men lowered old Rankell into his tomb.

Just then I saw the sunburnt giant grasp the arm of the bewigged little creature in front. And as the startled old fellow turned about in

alarm, I saw that the other did not look him in the wrinkled face ; but beneath the frown the pale eyes peered into vacancy with an air of terror, as if they had once seen an evil spirit whose image had burned itself into them.

“Do you believe there is a Hell?” I heard him whisper, in such half-articulate tones as you utter in a nightmare.

The little man shrunk away in fright, and I stared at the strange creature. Was he strayed from some mad-house, or only, as I had thought, shuddering through the after-moments of some debauch? The little man in dyed whiskers shook his arm as if to escape, but found himself held in a grip as firm as the uncanny mariner’s who forced the wedding-guest to hear his tale.

“Do you believe there is a Hell?” repeated the sunburnt man in the same dreamy voice. “I hope there is. I want to go there — to hear him howl.”

“I heard a voice from Heaven,” sang the white-robed choir as the dry leaves fluttered

down from the thinning trees, "saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours."

"I knew him," went on the strange man. "Father used to be his clerk. If it was n't for him, we might have been together still, — father and mother and Sadie and me. It's his work, — what's come to us. I knew him."

The little mummy of a man he spoke to was trembling from head to foot. What the words meant he could not know. But I, who had been told the story of Joseph Lottimer, could guess their meaning; and, seized with a wish to be sure that my guess was right, I touched the clumsy giant's shoulder, asking who he was.

He dropped the arm of the frightened old man, who slunk away as far as the crowd would let him. He turned his pale eyes on me, but their look never met mine.

"I'm nobody," he said thickly; "it's no use remembering who I am. But I hope there

is a Hell. I want to go there — to hear him howl.”

Then, for the coffin was passed from sight down the granite steps of the tomb, he turned clumsily away, and forced his path with lumbering motion through the jesting crowd.

VI.

THE CHURCH OF SAINT MARY
THE VIRGIN.



I.

WHEN Rankell's will was read everybody stared. To be sure, the whole world knew that he left no kin nor any friend behind ; and some had ventured to guess that now perhaps some great public work might arise, to bear witness in time to come that under Rankell's rusty frock-coat a human heart had beaten after all. But nobody expected what came.

All that Rankell had — lands and stores and moneys — he left to a little company of shrewd men who were to make themselves into a corporation and elect successors to the end of time. Drawing fine large salaries, they might sell and invest and in all ways treat as seemed wise the property they were to manage. But when it came to spending, they must always associate with themselves the Bishop of the diocese and two others whom he should appoint, and three

artists who might always name their successors. With the advice of these Rankell's millions were to be spent.

And this is how: In Rankellville still lay vacant the weedy spot where the old Wyborne house had stood. Hither were to be summoned a concourse of artists, to compete with one another making plans for a church that should have no equal. This church was to be dedicated to Saint Mary the Virgin. In the midst of the church the rarest artist of all was to make a tomb covered with precious sculpture; and in that tomb Rankell should finally lie.

Rankell's fortune proved not so large as report had made it, but for all that larger than any other of his time. In this God-fearing land, too, the cynical remarked, religious foundations are not taxed, and every cent would tell. So there was money enough to support the lucky clergy who should find themselves in the nest that Rankell had feathered so warmly. There was money enough to keep the pile in repair so

long as the earth should be in good enough repair to hold it. And there was more than enough to pay the trustees, — bishops, artists, and all, — and to build the church of Saint Mary the Virgin in such manner as Rankell directed.

II.

FOR the most part people were pleased. The poorer sort, even though no good came to them, were glad to see a vast fortune taken forever from the hands of single men. The clergy, the architects, and those in general who cared for sentimental and æsthetic matters thought Rankell's plan admirable. To speak against it argued that you were unphilanthropic, or lacking in taste, or, worse still, possessed of an irreverent spirit.

But I, for my part, could think only of what Rankell had been in life and of what now he would seem in death. With no thought except for himself and for what he could lay his clutching hands on, he had toddled through the world

on his short legs, smiling with a smile in which nobody joined, until the cunning lines grew into furrows about his sharp eyes. And now, with no thought but for himself even to the end, he was to rest in peace among precious sculptures, his memory hallowed by the thoughts of those who in the house of his building reverently listened to the praise of God. By and by nobody would think of him apart from the holiness with which he should lie surrounded. His relics would grow precious. Those who knew of him only this last work that alone would survive, would dream lying dreams of a holy life that came to this holy ending. So, as other times than ours came upon the world, his name, which most of all should be forgotten, would live on, desecrating the sanctity he had reared about it.

III.

SUCH thoughts as these were in my mind and on my tongue when I heard the last news of him that has ever come to me. And as this

was in some measure different from what I have told of late, I must not keep myself from writing it here.

On the evening of the day when at last the people made choice between Cox, with his cleverness and his trickery, and the other candidate, who at least was honest, a little party gathered to hear the despatches that began to tell whether torches and shouts and battle-hymns had won the day, or the honest thought we had striven to arouse. For a long time this was doubtful; and as we sat talking of what might come, I fell to telling what I had seen of Rankell at the Convention, and then to speaking of him as I have just written.

In the company was one whom until lately none of us had seen for a long time. This was Dudley,—the same who, when we were boys, used to stay at the Wybornes', and who drew the little sketch of big-booted Hastings making his first bow. Years ago he had gone abroad to study nobody quite remembered what. And long after other men had begun the active work

of life he had stayed there, still studying, until those who sometimes spoke of him surmised that he doubtless knew everything. Lately he was come home at last,—a slight, pale man with a broad forehead, and a dark beard parted in the middle. And he had quite upset the surmise of his friends by announcing that when he finished his studies he purposed practising the art of architecture. As yet, he said, he could not pretend to be more than a critic. The only things he had approached mastering were two or three schools of mediæval church-building. He was come home now, preparatory to another period of study, to satisfy himself as to what the genius of the American people demanded. He was satisfied already that he had made a false start; that churches were as much things of the past as Greek temples. The typical building of the future, he began to think, was the public library.

Dudley talked well when he chose, but oftener chose to display his consummate mastery of the art of listening. So everybody

liked him, and he had an acquaintance among the most unexpected kind of people. For all this, everybody was surprised when one of the three artists named by Rankell's will to supervise the building of his church — drawing enviable salaries the while — turned out to be this same Dudley. A little before the Convention, it appeared, something had called Rankell for a few weeks to England. Here he had fallen in with Dudley, and they had come home in the same steamer.

Dudley declined the appointment. It would interfere with his study, he said; besides, he did not yet feel competent to deal with so grave a responsibility as Rankell cast on him. Still, he was not averse to talking of the old fellow, and he talked more kindly than most. So now, when he heard me inveighing with more vehemence than taste against a still green memory, he interposed. So far as Rankell had shown himself in their short acquaintance, he said, the man was by no means as purely vicious as I made him out.

"Any way," said Dudley, "it seems to me that you draw him a shade too simply for truth. Psychological fact involves more inconsistency, don't you think?"

Then he went on to give us a glimpse of what he called another phase of Rankell, telling how they met.

IV.

It was in an old English town, on the road from London to one of the manufacturing districts, far enough from both to keep itself unspotted from the dust of either, not so far as to keep disturbing modern energy from being drawn away in one direction or the other. So it still remains a quiet, sleepy place, clustering about its tall cathedral. Here one day were gathered in the choir, for some local festival, half the church singers in the diocese; and nave and aisles were full of people standing about the Gothic chantries, and the quaint slabs where crusaders lay with their mailed hands on their sword-hilts, while the music rose full and clear

to the groined roof. Here Dudley first saw Rankell, not guessing who he was. The little man stood beside the effigy of one William Longspear, who came back from Palestine to die in peace under the Plantagenets; and Rankell had laid his rusty beaver hat on the crossed feet of the crusader, so that nobody should sit or tread on it; then, with his hands loosely crossed in front, he was looking intently at the carved oaken stalls and benches full of white-robed singers, and now and then slowly bowed his head as if in approval of the anthems. Once or twice his eyes grew moist, and he slowly drew out a large handkerchief and wiped them with deliberation; whether this moisture was due to emotion, or to the sunlight that streamed through a painted window close at hand, was not apparent.

Dudley's curiosity was stirred by this emotional little man, whom he guessed to be one of those obscure unfortunates whose broken lives find comfort in the venerable sanctuaries of the English Church. There are plenty such

in cathedral towns never missing a service. And Dudley found the little figure so typical that he permitted himself to stare at it until the devout old man grew aware of his attention, and looking up reminded him of his manners by dryly muttering, "How d-e do, sir?"

The voice and manner were so unlike what Dudley had expected, that when the service was over he ventured to address the small man, hoping to find what manner of person he really was. His speech was some commonplace about the rare beauty of the cathedral with its rich-toned windows, and its towers and buttresses overgrown with glossy ivy.

"Handsome edifice, sir," assented the little man. "Know it well, sir?"

This sudden and incongruous betrayal of nationality would have disconcerted anybody whose sensibility was less genuine than Dudley's. But he, more interested than ever at hearing what seemed like honest sentiment thus expressed in the dialect of Broadway omnibuses, answered that he knew the place a little

and was about to look at it with care ; would his new friend join him ?

“ Well,” said Rankell, deliberately, “ I don’t care if I do. I’m a stranger here myself.”

So together, with an untidy verger who emerged from behind a pillar, they spent a long time in the old church ; and Dudley, finding his companion eager to learn, talked much about the growth of the pile. He showed the heavy round arches that had first been reared ; then he pointed out how those who continued the work found their thoughts soaring higher, and so the pointed arches came ; then there was decorated work full of the aspiration of a throbbing faith ; then, as the heat of enthusiasm waned, came the cold perpendicular windows and central tower. Then the empty niches and the whitened walls told the story of iconoclasm and Puritan sternness. And there was a fine new reredos covered with mystical sculpture, that spoke of Oxford in the times when men who are now old believed that they should make the world better than

it was in their youth. Finally, from a restored capital there grinned at them the distorted countenance of a living statesman whose eye-glass we have all seen in *Punch*, and whose portrait was held to be a masterpiece of grotesque, conceived in the true mediæval spirit.

Rankell asked a number of questions that displayed intelligence, but made no comments; and except that Dudley found appreciative listening a pleasant surprise, the talk was disappointing. But in the end Rankell wished him good-day in a way that he felt touching. Hesitating a moment, the little man timidly held out his wrinkled hand.

“It’s a big thing to a man like me, sir,” he said, “to come across somebody who knows what he’s talking about. I don’t know much myself, sir, and I like to be told. Good-morning, sir.”

With that Rankell lifted his hat and trudged off across the close, disappearing through a war-like Norman gateway. And Dudley, remaining awhile to sketch some details of the porch,

wondered who his quaint little friend might be.

“What impressed me most,” said Dudley, “was that I could not help talking to him ; so, you see, he must have been really sympathetic.”

On the steamer coming home, as I have said, Dudley met Rankell again. His aspect was changed. Americans were on board who looked at a millionaire with such respect as the British feel for a lord. And Rankell appeared comically conscious of dignity as he tramped the deck in his low-cut black waistcoat, nodding curtly under his black silk travelling-cap to such fortunate fellow-passengers as he happened to know. For several days he ignored Dudley ; but at last, as Dudley sat watching a cloudless sunset, he heard a sharp little voice wishing him good-evening. And there was Rankell, who professed much pleasure in finally assuring himself that Dudley was the gentleman with whom he had inspected the cathedral.

He fell to talking of this at once ; and from

that time on, though they talked much, he always led the talk to the same subject.

“It’s the biggest thing in England, sir,” he kept repeating. “I’ve visited ’em all, and there is n’t another that can hold a candle to it.”

He asked unexpected questions about the old place,—among others, for whom it was named. Dudley, thinking he referred to the town where the church stood, began an explanation which displayed knowledge of Anglo-Saxon.

“I don’t mean that,” interrupted Rankell; “I read that in the guide-book, sir. I mean the building. The book says it was dedicated to Saint Mary the Virgin. Is that the same as the Virgin Mary?”

Dudley believed it was.

“I s’posed so,” said Rankell. “I understand the edifice was erected by the Catholics. Only I wondered whether there was any other Mary they might have named it for,—somebody they knew, for instance,—somebody that lived there once.”

Dudley went on to explain how the founders of the old religious houses used to name them after their patron saints instead of themselves and their friends. Rankell listened thoughtfully.

"It's a real pretty idea," he said. "The name sounds a sight better than if it was the Mary So-and-so Memorial, don't it?"

So day after day they talked about the venerable place where they first met, and Rankell kept saying that we ought to have something of the kind in America. Dudley tried to point out the impossibility of such a thing. A great church means a great sacrifice of time and thought and money. It can grow only in a time when the lives of thousands are consecrated to the work. But this was too deep for Rankell, who persisted in asserting that the church in question was a big thing, that we ought to have things like it in America, and that in his opinion there was a growing demand for them.

When the steamer reached America they parted. Dudley never saw Rankell again. His

surprise at the honor paid him in the will was as great as anybody's.

“But I was touched, too,” he said in conclusion. “The old fellow may have been a skin-flint, if you please, or even an out-and-out knave. But there was this other side to him; and this church he wanted built shows it was genuine.”

V.

Dudley told his story so sympathetically that it touched us all for the moment; and I, who could recall what Mr. Wyborne told of Mary Lee, began to wonder whether in my warmth I had quite done justice to the grotesque little man who lay, fresh in death, in St. Peter's churchyard. But just then despatches about the elections, coming thick and fast, began to show that there was small room for hope that Cox was beaten. And when we parted, with little belief that the next day's news would prove the people to have thought honestly, Rankell was once more in my mind what he

had been when I last saw him alive. As I made my way home through streets where the name of Cox was in everybody's mouth, there kept rising before me a picture of the Convention as I had seen it, with hired fellows shouting and waving flags, and frightened delegates in pale disorder, and in the midst of the turmoil a grinning little bald yellow head nodding its gold glasses off its nose as it caught the eye of the Hon. Cneius P. M. Montgomery.

And this aspect of Rankell, which was what I had grown used to, was what stayed by me. It was with no pleasure, then, that I read how there was a famous competition of designs for the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, and what more was told of the structure. The work was begun, and day after day and year after year it grew. In summer-time, when the papers lacked news, there were long descriptions of its progress. We read how the cornerstone was laid, and how the foundations were finished, and how the walls and the roof rose, and how the stone floor was put in place.

We read statistics of the cost of all this, and of the numbers of otherwise penniless laborers who could find work on the pile. More and more we read sentimental eulogies of the great benevolence and the sterling piety of the dead millionaire whose will was thus coming to pass.

But to me, Rankell was still the Rankell I had known. And my temper rose in anger when at last I began to read that the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin was almost finished ; and finally how, on a certain day early in the coming spring, all that remained of Rankell was to be taken from the simple tomb under the trees of St. Peter's churchyard, and with grand music and solemn prayers to be laid to rest for all time to come in the great stone sepulchre that the cunningest workmen in the world had built to hold it.

VII.

RANKELL'S REMAINS.

I.

ONE night, a little before the time fixed for the translation, there came such a storm as men remember for years. The spirits of all the dead heretics cast forth into the upper air could not have made fiercer weather. Even the night-birds who flit about great cities fled back to their unhallowed nests. The watchman who paced up and down before St. Peter's churchyard made sure that no living thing would venture out to spy him ; so he slunk into the driest corner of the church porch, where he pulled his cap about his ears, and shivered, and swung his arms across his chest, until dawn came and drove away the tempest. Then, when the sun peeped between the scurrying clouds, the streets were full of brown slush that had fallen in snow white as an infant's soul, and had been tossed and trampled and buffeted into the thing it

was. And down the gutters ran muddy streams which poured baby cataracts into the grated mouths of the sewers, sweeping along to the greasy rivers the hideous things that would have stopped their flow. These the tides wash back and forth until at last they sink down in the black mud, there to wallow through years without end, while fresh corruption ever settles down above them burying them deeper and deeper still.

When the watchman ventured out from St. Peter's porch he saw a sight that sent him on the run for the police; and the police came on the run, along with enterprising reporters. And the morning papers published extra editions — profitable to stockholders — telling what had happened.

In the midst of the smoky mist that curled up from the churchyard mire lay a little heap of muddy sod, freshly dug. Beside it Rankell's tomb stood open, its great slate-stone cover cracked in two by some giant blow. At the foot of the granite steps, down which the

churchyard wet was trickling into dank pools, lay the broken coffin, its satin lining covered with stains where the corruption of death mingled with the droppings of the tempest. And of Rankell there was nothing left except one tuft of faded yellow hair that had caught on a nail as his unwelcome visitors had drawn him from the bed where he had thought to lie so snug.

II.

GHASTLY black-mail, the papers called the deed. And preachers sighed out despairing questions: to what depth of wickedness will not the greed of money bring evil-minded men? No one doubted what the news meant. Some band of rascals, knowing with all the world what a fortune the lucky corporation held who were building the church of Saint Mary the Virgin, had plotted to have a part of it for themselves. Stealing through the storm they had crept between the broken bars of the iron paling. What noise they made in breaking

them was lost in the roaring of the tempest. Then with skilful hands they had turned back the sod, and coming to the slate-stone slab they had broken it with some heavy tool, so that they might lift it with more ease. Then they had slunk down the steps, with lanterns they dared light at last; and by the strong light that a turn of the hand could darken if the guard they left without spoke a warning word, they had pried open the silver-nailed coffin and looked on the shrunken face of the dead. With that, perhaps, they had stopped for a moment, sick with the horror of what they did; very likely they were roused again only by the voice of the guard, who peering down asked what checked the work. They were gone too far to turn back; so nerving themselves, and thinking of what profit would come when all was done, they had braved the sanctity of death and the horror of corruption, and had rudely pulled the sickly thing from its coffin and dragged it up the granite steps. There a coarse bag lay ready for it; so in they thrust it in the darkness.

Then with their grisly treasure they had hurried off through the storm; and so waited now until they could have what terms they might ask.

All this was clear enough, and finely written up in the papers. But who the ghouls were, or how many, nobody could guess. There was much virtuous talk at first; not a cent should the rascals have, but they should be hunted down and punished with all the severity our merciful law allows. A great army of detectives were set on their track. But days went by, and weeks, and months; and all the detectives found was what they found the very first day. Then one of them had spied a half-starved cur licking the stone of the churchyard wall close by where the paling was broken. And looking to see what the greedy creature found, he had driven off the brute, who slunk growling away and sat hungrily watching on the curbstone. There, on the edge of the wall, was a stain which by and by the chemists said might have oozed from what had once been human

flesh. And that was all the detectives ever found of Rankell.

So at last, when the papers declared it was evident that detectives could not detect, people began to say that the rogues must have their way. A man like Rankell must never be suffered to lie unknown so long as there was money left to bring him to the light. The corporation of the new church that still lay unconsecrated had stormy meetings. Finally came advertisements asking what sum was demanded for the return of the body that had been stolen. And when these brought no answer there followed others, promising at last, along with sums that made us all stare, that those who brought back what was left of Rankell should go free.

But even this, which people now declared was the least that a pious regard for the dead could decently demand, met with no more success than the threats and the questions. Nothing, it seemed, could bring Rankell to the light again.

What all this meant nobody rightly knew. But at last people came to believe that the body-snatchers, vile as they might be, were sick with shame and horror at what they had done. It is one thing to dig up a dead nobody for the doctors to dissect; it is far another to take possession of the mortal remains of an eminent citizen whose sterling piety has written itself on the face of the earth in characters of carven stone. The most hardened must shrink from confessing even to themselves such a deed as that. It is the most unspeakable of sins unspeakable. So this, people guessed, is why to this day Rankell's grand stone sepulchre stands empty under the fretted roof that was built to hold it.

III.

BUT for all that Rankell was gone, the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin stood ready for the service of the Lord, with its twin towers, and its painted glass, and its dim aisles, and its organ with three unique stops. A Doctor of

Music, too,—who was a famous philosopher into the bargain,—was come from Germany to play the organ for the highest salary on record; and a corps of parsons as sound as country eggs had been appointed to conduct the services. So one day a glorious company of lawn-sleeved bishops, along with a goodly fellowship of surpliced presbyters, and a noble army of professional singers, came to consecrate the church. And as all the world went to Rankellville to see the sight I went too.

Dudley, who had a ticket of admission to one of the best seats, went with me. Once or twice since he came home with Rankell he had flitted back and forth from Europe. His studies puzzled him, he said; the conditions of American life were so like those of the Old World, and yet so different, that it was hard to decide just how far the old models would serve him for serious work. He needed constantly to refresh his impressions both here and there. When at home he had liked to watch the growth of the church in whose building he would have no hand. He

would talk of it in a vein that some thought absurdly mystical.

“Rankell was right,” he said once, “and I was wrong. A real church can be built to-day. What misled me was that the motive is so rare that I thought it dead. A church, you know, must be the outcome of thousands of life-works. The old churches, we like to think, were the outcome of consciously devoted lives. This one has all the lives behind it, but they never knew what they worked for. It needed Rankell, in this doubting age, to gather them all together and express them in the best truth he knew.”

So thinking, he wished of course to see the christening of the church; and as we slowly walked towards the structure, he fell to criticising.

“It is far better,” he said, “than we had any reason to hope. There is feeling in every line. But to me the most meaning fact of all is that they have used the round arch throughout. I thought they were wrong at first, but I was wrong myself. Christianity is past its zenith.

That marvellous soaring Gothic belongs to a time when men feel that there are endless things beyond what they see. All that is past now. Could anything better express what religion is to-day, than those massive lines, half sinking under the weight they bear, yet bravely bearing it all the same? — By the way, it's a pity they have had to put a wooden roof above the stone vaulting ; the foundations, as I was afraid, were too weak for more stone."

A little later we spoke of Rankell, wondering where he might be lying instead of here where his tomb stood empty.

"It is horrible to think of," said Dudley with a shudder ; "yet after all, if you will only make yourself feel it, the lasting part of him is here, and always will be."

A little afterwards he passed on to the seat where his ticket took him, and I was left alone in the crowd, not far from the empty tomb. The service began. It was very beautiful, and so I think all felt who were come to hear it ; for they knelt, and rose, and stood, in the dim

light that came through the painted windows, with a reverence more of other days than of ours. By and by a white-haired bishop began reading the Gospel, and the whole company rose to hear the sacred words.

“And the Jew’s Passover was at hand,” read the saintly man, whose voice trembled with the wear of eighty holy years, “and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise.”

Just then I heard behind me a muttering as if some one were speaking to himself; and turning to see who disturbed the quiet, I saw close at hand the rude giant of a fellow whom I had recognized for Joe Lottimer when they

buried Rankell in St. Peter's churchyard. He was pale now, and thin. His cheek-bones stood out like those of a dead man, and there were dark lines beneath the pale blue eyes that peered into vacancy with a stare more terrified than before. He stood feebly rubbing his bald brow with a gnarled hand that seemed all bone; and he looked toward the sculptured tomb, muttering words that as I turned I could understand.

"They won't have to cast him out," mumbled his thick voice. "He'll never be there to cast out."

I laid my hand on his arm. Whatever his wrongs, he must be silenced now. I spoke his name in a whisper.

"Who are you?" he asked roughly, loud enough to disturb the people about us.

I whispered that I was a friend who knew what was in his mind. This was no place for us; let him come with me. And I gently took him by the arm.

He looked at me doubtingly; for a moment

I thought he would oppose me, for he pulled his arm roughly from my grasp; but it was only to take my arm instead, with a grip from which I felt I could not free it.

“Yes,” he whispered, “it’s no place for men like you and me. There’s where he would have been.” And he pointed, with the hand that held his woollen cap, to the empty tomb.

Together we made our way through the troubled worshippers, and so out into the sunshine, where the shadows were growing long. And when we stood before the round arches of the porch that bent beneath the weight of the twin towers, he looked back, with a face full of hatred, and spoke again.

“They won’t have to cast him out. He’ll never be there.”

“Who knows?” I said, half wishing his words were true. “They may find him yet.”

He turned his dull eyes and looked straight at mine.

“I know,” he said. “Come with me and I’ll show you why.” And his grasp on my

arm tightened until I thought the bone would break.

He turned back once. Through the open doors of the church we could see the sparkle of candles on the great altar, and above the throng of people rose the dim white outline of the marble tomb that was made for Rankell ; and the sound of the Hundredth Psalm came pealing from the choir.

“ Look there,” he said. “ There ’s where he would have been.”

With that he led me away through the decent streets of the town that Rankell built where the Wybornes’ gardens used to grow ; and I had no choice but to go with him, feeling that, whatever chanced, I had saved from desecration the solemn service we left behind.

In such strange company I made my way back to the city, wondering whither he would lead me, and so beset by this wonder that after a while I would not have left him if I could. And he kept silent, looking nowhither, but with his pale face and hanging jaw seeming rather like a dead man than a living.

When at last we came to the city, he led me through the streets, until finally we stood just without the paling of St. Peter's churchyard. It was evening now, and the moonlight cast the shadow of St. Peter's spire among the graves, and the black outline of the cock who turned his face to the wind on the topmost point lay just across the tomb where Rankell had once rested.

"Look there," said Lottimer, his breath heaving deep. "There's where we saw him put. Now come with me."

He led me only a few steps farther, and pointed down.

"There's where he is," he said in a whisper that sent a shiver through me. The grated sewer-mouth grinned at our feet, and the gurgle of the foul waters within laughed in our ears.

I stood sick with horror as I felt his grasp loosen from my arm.

"It was me that did it," he went on, speaking faster than I had thought he could, — "me all alone. I was strong enough then."

And then he grasped my arm once more, and put his lips close to my ear as he spoke again.

“There is a Hell!” he said. “I know it now. I’m going there — to hear him howl!”

With that he let my arm drop, and turning suddenly fled away into the shadow of St. Peter’s Church; and though I called out aloud, hastening after him, I could not tell whither he went.

CONCLUSION.

SO now I have placed side by side the fragments that tell me how Rankell lived, and how he died, and what he left behind, and what is become of it. Throughout his life he worked evil, and to pay for that he lies now where no human hands can find him.

Yet if this were all, I for one would not have dragged him back from the nameless place where his sins might lie forgotten. There is another meaning in his story, and a deeper. Of old, I used to think only how his merciless life was all spent in clutching what came within his grasp,—how with his last act he built a vast monument to the self that busied all his thoughts. But now I begin to see that this was not all. I begin to remember how, years ago, he wept over the grave where they were burying the dead girl he never knew. I

begin to remember how Dudley found him with moist eyes listening in the old cathedral to sacred music. Even in Rankell, I begin to see, the better nature, choked and stifled by the world in which he struggled, had never yielded up the ghost.

With his last act he built, half unawares, a monument that will tell no untruth to those who kneel and give thanks in the church he made consecrate to Mary the Virgin. The twin towers and the painted glass and the solemn service will speak truth of him through the centuries, telling only of what in him was best. What was base and foul is gone where no human eyes can see it. What is left he consecrated with his last act to the name of one in whose presence he was always humble. As from corruption spring flowers, there has sprung from the sordid thing we knew as Rankell a work that, so long as even memory of the Christian faith shall last, will bear to men messages of pardon and of peace.

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